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World War II

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COVER: Looking for trouble, a German gunner scans his field of fire. In Sicily, trouble came soon enough—from the war's second-largest amphibious assault, and from the air, in the war's only confrontation between opposing airborne units. The units, coincidentally the German 1st Division Green Devils and the British 1st Division Red Devils, went head-to-head at the Primosole Bridge, a key crossing of the Simeto River on the edge of the hotly contested Catania plain (story, Page 26). ABOVE: Later, somewhere along a front extending from Sicily on up the Italian boot, Brits of the Shropshire Yeomanry unsling another explosive arrow from their 5.5-inch piece.

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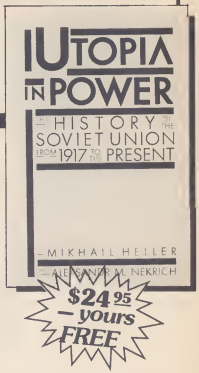

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Without his wartime generals of the 1880s, how would Hitler and Germany have fared in the 1940s?

One provides the plan for conquering France. Another walks into a Polish field of fire. A third comes closest to Moscow, then, later, is executed as a Resistance member. Still another is the genius behind the *Panzer* divisions. A fifth is the *Luftwaffe* general whose claim to fame is his holding action against Allied land armies in Italy.

And so on goes the list. Not all of Hitler's generals, but a startling array of his not-always-so-eager stalwarts hail from a single historical bracket, from the decade of the 1880s. For that miniscule window of time is when they were born. So many of them, one has to wonder what impact an infantile epidemic or a King Herod might have wrought upon the course of World War II. Among the best-known of Hitler's military hierarchy, only two would have escaped such odd purge—Gerd von Rundstedt (too old) and Erwin Rommel (a year too young).

A German battery announces its presence in Norway. Where this crew would be had some childhood epidemic robbed the Reich of its many key generals during the 1880s is open to debate.

Hitler, himself, would have missed World War II, since he was born in 1889. Without him, one may wonder also if there would have been a second world war at all . . . and yet, how long would Germany have remained discomfitted and sorely rankled by the more stringent provisions of the Versailles Treaty? Or lived peaceably with the knowledge of defeat in World War I? The crystal ball does not say.

Without her generals of the 1880s, however, even a Hitler-led Germany would have gone to war in 1939 minus the moving force behind the tank-led *Blitzkrieg*, Heinz Guderian (1888).

Without Erich von Manstein's "Sickle Plan" for the invasion of France by way of the allegedly impassable Ardennes, Germany might have fallen into the same stalemate that greeted her loop through neutral Belgium in World War I. Manstein, though, *was* born—in 1887.

Who else? Well, Albert Kesselring, the *Luftwaffe* Field marshal who learned to fly when in his late 40s, was born in 1885. Nearly 60 years later, he stubbornly held to every foot of Italy (related story, Page 30) possible to the war's eleventh hour, as a ground commander *par excellence*.

Among the ranking commanders taking part in Hitler's invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941 was nearly the entire "Class of the 1880s." For here were Guderian, Manstein, Fedor von Bock (1880); Paul von Kleist (1881); Walter von Reichenau (1884); Guenther von Kluge (1882) and Wilhelm List (1880), to say nothing of various lesser lights. At same time, pulling strings from headquarters back home were Franz Halder (1884), chief of the Army General Staff, and Walter von Brauchitsch (1881), commander-in-chief.

In the USSR, the ranking general coming closest to Moscow (together with Hermann Hoth) was Erich Hoepner (1886), whose Fourth Armored Corps had Moscow in its sights late in 1941, until the Russians (and their wintry clime) stopped the advance, then threw it back. A conspirator against Hitler even before the war, Hoepner was accused, tortured and hanged after the July 20, 1944, bomb plot against Hitler had failed.

Hoepner went to his death refusing to oblige by committing suicide. Kluge, on the other hand, aware of the anti-Hitler conspiracy, but a fence-straddler and no activist, did commit suicide when summoned to Hitler's side from the Normandy front in the summer of 1944.

Many in that generation of the 1880s, in fact, met terrifying end. Werner von Fritsch (1880), chief of the Army's High Command and an opponent of Hitler's war plans, was "eased" out of high position in the late 1930s by charges that he was a homosexual. He later was cleared of that cloud and a related charge of submitting to blackmail, but too late, of course, to regain his former post. Recalled to active duty for the invasion of Poland in 1939, as a "Colonel-in-Chief," he walked into the stream of fire from a Polish machine gun.

If Fritsch deliberately sought death, as many surmise, that was not the case with Fedor von Bock, who commanded Army Group Center for the abortive drive on Moscow. Among the many generals dismissed for their alleged "failures" in battle, the former field marshal enjoyed a quiet retirement of sorts in wartorn Germany—until he was killed in an Allied air raid on Schleswig-Holstein May 4, 1945, four days before war's end.

Perhaps the worst fate of all from the generation of the Eighties, the 1880s, though, was that suffered by Karl Heinrich von Stuelpnagel (1886), military governor of occupied France from 1942 to 1944. Noted for his harsh measures against the French Resistance, Stuelpnagel nonetheless was up to his neck in the conspiracy against Hitler that hatched the bomb plot of July 1944.

Before word of Hitler's survival reached Paris, Stuelpnagel exposed his role by ordering the arrest of Gestapo and SS men under his command. Ordered back to Berlin, he stopped his car at Verdun, walked off a ways and then shot himself in the head with a pistol.

The suicide attempt failed—he succeeded only in blinding himself. A month later, led by hand to the gallows that he couldn't see, he was hanged in Plötzensee Prison . . . one more general from the generation of the 1880s

C.B.K.

World War II

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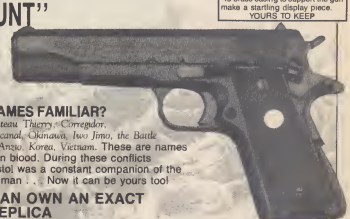

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Polikarpov's "Little Donkey" was a mainstay fighter —if a dated one—for the Soviets.

By Ed Jordan

The front as Germany attacked Soviet Russia in June 1941 ran from the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea. Operation BARBAROSSA began with the bombing of Russian airfields. The Germans certainly knew where to strike, too. Soviet airmen wept as their aircraft, neatly lined up, were destroyed by the marauding *Luftwaffe.*

But some managed to get into the air. Senior Lieutenant Dimitri Kokorev of the 124 I.A.P. (Fighter Regiment), his ammunition exhausted, deliberately rammed his ancient-looking fighter into a Messerschmidt BF-110, sending it down to crash. After Kokorev was able to land his I-16 successfully, the dangerous ram attack became an accepted way of combat for the desperate Soviets. It was used at least nine times during the first day of BARBAROSSA.

By the end of that day, however, the Russians had lost an estimated 1,489 aircraft on the ground and 322 in the air. The Germans lost just 35. By June 29, the Soviet losses totaled a staggering 4,990, as against 179 for the Germans. What had gone wrong? Alexander Yakovlev (of Yak fighter fame) aptly asked, "Where was our Air Force?"

I-16s fly a sky swept clean of enemies. For all its faults, the "Widow Maker" was ahead of its time—but even when its time ended, it fought grimly on, as a good Russian should.

The search for scapegoats brought the aircraft designer Nikolai N. Polikarpov under criticism because his I-16 fighters were not equal to the latest German models, such as the BF-109F. Disgraced (or not), he was the man who had created the I-16 "Ishak" (Little Donkey) a decade before.

Polikarpov headed a design team at the Central Design Bureau, where work had commenced in 1932 on two new fighters. One was to be an improved version of the successful Polikarpov I-5 and would become famous as the gull-winged I-15 "Chato" biplane. The other would be the first low-wing retractable-gear monoplane fighter with an enclosed cockpit to go into service in any country.

Polikarpov reasoned that low-wing, monoplane fighters would be the shape of the future. He designed a large circular cross-section fuselage of wooden monocoque construction to go with the 700-horsepower Wright Cyclone radial engine. The wings had two spars of(chrome) steel tubing, with ribs of duralumin and tail surfaces of metal frame. All the flying surfaces were fabric-covered and fully cantilevered. The one-piece windshield and canopy slid forward on rails for access. The TsKB-12 looked rugged—and it was.

The landing gear was raised and lowered by a hand crank. This, too, was a bold venture—other countries were just getting into monoplane fighters with fixed, braced undercarriages.

On December 31, 1933, the TsKB-12 prototype flew for the first time. Powered by the 480hp M-22 engine (because it was available), it attained a top speed of 224 miles per hour. The second model followed in February 1934, and was fitted with the imported 700hp Wright Cyclone engine. Top speed jumped to an amazing 279mph. The model ordered into production, however, had the M-22 engine and appeared as the Polikarpov I-16, Type 1, the "1" standing for *Istrabetil,* or fighter.

Deliveries began in autumn of 1934. Less than 30 Type 1's were built, and these served only for familiarization and development. Two "V" flights of five I-16's made their public debut over Red Square during the May Day celebration of 1935. Amazingly, foreign observers present hardly noticed them.

Later versions of the I-16 used imported American Wright Cyclone engines of 710hp, but later models used the license-built M-25 version of the same engine. (23) Top speed was now 282 mph, making the I-16 the fastest production fighter in the world for a time.

All was not rosy for the new monoplane, however. From the start, it was obvious that the I-16 was no airplane for a novice pilot. The short, blunt nose, the small size for its weight, and the center-of-gravity location, all contributed to longitudinal instability. When the power was pulled back, it was easy to stall. Approaches to land were made with

Continued on page 55

WORLD WAR II ON VIDEO

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Rudolf Hess practiced in a "hot" new plane for his controversial 1941 flight to England.

By Blaine Taylor

The time was early in the year 1941, and the armies of victorious Nazi Germany had just overrun most of Western Europe. The British Expeditionary Force had been chased back across the English Channel from the port of Dunkirk, and the world still expected a full-scale air-and-seaborne invasion of the British Isles at any moment—but most especially in that spring.

Colonel Hans Baur—Adolf Hitler's personal pilot since 1932—was enjoying himself at an evening reception in the Reich Chancellor's sumptuous Prinzregentenstrasse apartment in Munich when he was approached by a tall, rugged and beetle-browed man with dark, piercing eyes and bushy, black hair.

"He came straight up to me and declared bluntly, 'Baur, I want a map of the forbidden air zones.' "

"I had such a map for my own use," Baur reported in his postwar memoirs, *Hitler's Pilot*, "but I dared not let it out of my hands because I was sending planes here, there and everywhere all the time, and before every flight I naturally had to make quite certain that they went nowhere near those zones where they might be shot down by our own flak.

"Moreover, that map was clearly marked 'Reich Top Secret,' which meant that I was not allowed to let anyone else know its contents. This secret map showed those zones over which even German planes were not allowed to fly. . . as the details changed from time to time, you couldn't learn them. . . by heart once and for all."

Why, Baur wondered silently to himself, did this strange man want the map at all? The brooding figure standing before him was already known among his Nazi Party colleagues as a man of mysterious habits (like Hitler, he, too, was a confirmed vegetarian in a meat-eating nation) and practices (he believed in the occult and regularly consulted astrologers, it was whispered).

Before his daring flight, an ever-devious Rudolf Hess poses in a patronizing manner with a seemingly reluctant youth during a victory tour of occupied Eastern territories.

And yet, Rudolf Hess, Hitler's recently-announced Deputy *Führer*, was a top figure in the Nazi hierarchy and was publicly known to be third in line to succeed to the Reich Chancellery—after the *Luftwaffe's* Reich Marshal Hermann Göring and Hitler himself. One of the *Führer's* earliest adherents, Hess had battled German Communists in the early days of The Movement, both with fists and beer steins, and had played a prominent role in the abortive 1923 putsch, or revolt, aimed at seizing power illegally. When the attempt was crushed, Hess fled, but he returned voluntarily to serve a prison sentence at Landsberg Fortress with his mentor—and to help him write his best-selling book, *Mein Kampf* (My Battle.) It was Hess, too, who enunciated for Hitler's benefit the concept of *liebensraum*—living space—used to rationalize Hitler's design to the East.) After both were released, Hess clung to Hitler's coattails, rising steadily in both Party and Reich leadership posts. During the late 1930's, Hitler had designated Hess to greet such top dignitaries as British guests attending the 1936 Olympic Games in Berlin, among them the Duke of Hamilton, and the next year, when Italian *Duce* Benito Mussolini came to the Reich. In addition, this was the very *public Führer* who frequently announced Hitler's presence at the mass meeting that characterized pre-war Nazi Germany. As a close intimate of Hitler for two decades, Rudolf Hess was privy to the smallest details of Hitler's personal life and of his far-reaching political plans for the future.

As Baur knew also, Hess had had his own career as a World War I Flier and barnstorming pilot in prewar Germany, (he won the Zugspitze race in 1935). Prior to the 1941 meeting in Hitler's Munich flat, Baur now recalled he had run into the Messerschmidt firm's chief test pilot four weeks before in Vienna, and he had mentioned that "Rudolf Hess came to the Messerschmidt works in Augsburg to try out the new Me-210, the very latest two-engined plane, a very

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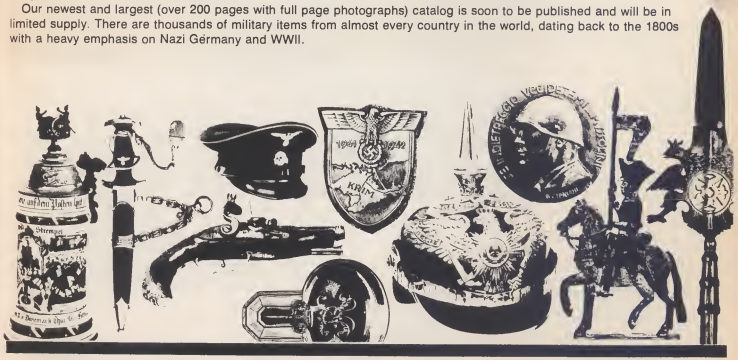

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The absolute nadir of British fortunes in Burma gave fresh opportunity for the last Sepoy general.

By Raymond Callahan

Friday, October 15, 1943—a staff car, the red and black pennon of an Army commander waving on its hood, drove along the road from the Calcutta airport to the Army cantonment in suburban Barrackpore. In the rear a 51-year-old acting lieutenant general with a memorably rugged face sat in lonely splendor.

It had been an accident-plagued trip. His aide-de-camp had broken his leg, and so the general was alone. His plane had arrived early, and no one was there to meet him. He eventually found a driver and car waiting for another officer and commandeered both. Now, as he headed for his new command—Eastern Army, about to be rechristened Fourteenth Army—William Joseph Slim, who had been on the verge of retirement as a lieutenant colonel only four years before, had a moment for earnest reflection. "[I] watched an army commander's . . . flag fluttering over the bonnet of the car, and wondered where I was really going."

An officer by drive and not by birth, Lieut. Gen. William J. Slim (shown at Fort Dufferin) performed brilliantly and conceived the monsoon campaign of Burma, which gave the Raj a final burst of glory during the sunset of the Empire in India.

He was on his way into history, the man who took imperial Britain's most thoroughly beaten army and transformed it into one of the most successful fighting forces of the war. He was on his way to the summit of his profession, to the office of chief of staff of the British Army, a field marshal's baton and a peerage. The last great field commander produced by Britain's Indian Army was about to lead his service to its final moment of glory.

The Indian Army was unique, not only in British history, but in the whole tale of European imperial enterprise. Beginning as a small body of armed guards for the Honorable East India Company's trading posts in 17th-century India, it had grown by the mid-19th into one of the largest standing armies in the world, the British Empire's strategic reserve in the East. Entirely Indian (its soldiers known as "sepoys") except for a small corps of British officers, it had its own structure and traditions, all jealously guarded. When the Company, by now ruler of India, was disbanded in 1859 and the British government began to manage India directly, the Indian Army retained its separate existence.

Two things about it are of great significance. The British officers of the Indian Army came from a different strata of British society than those of the British Army. They were largely middle class, far less patrician than the guardsmen and cavalry officers who dominated the regular British service. In addition, India had long been a training ground for British soldiers. Wellington (dismissed rather prematurely by Napoleon as a mere "sepoy general") learned his trade in India, and the Indian Army had produced as well the best-known British field commander of the Victorian era, Field Marshal Lord Roberts, Kipling's "Bobs."

Only an initial world war broke through the social class barriers and made Slim an officer; it took a second to keep him from joining the numerous retired colonels who populated British spas. Slim's family were what George Orwell called "upper lower middle" class—not the material from which regular Army officers were made in pre-1914 Britain. Slim, who always wanted to be a soldier, got himself commissioned in 1914 through the Birmingham University Officer Training Unit.

He held onto his commission (originally in the Royal Warwickshire Regiment, Montgomery's regiment) by transferring in 1920 to the Indian Army, where "good family" and private income were unnecessary. In the next 18 years he advanced two grades. When World War II came along he was on the verge of retirement, a lieutenant colonel already rather elderly for his job as a battalion commander. Hitler saved him.

Within weeks he was a brigade commander; in May 1941 he obtained a division as an acting major general. In the spring of 1942 he was summoned from Persia to become a corps commander (and acting lieutenant general) in Burma.

Helmuth von Moltke, whose military brilliance made Bismarck's diplomacy so successful, once remarked that no one could be considered a great commander who had not had to conduct a retreat.

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In March 1942, Slim took over Burma Corps, two battered and partially demoralized divisions and over the next two months successfully withdrew them, under relentless Japanese pressure, to India. This thousand-mile retreat was the most difficult conducted by an Allied general during the war. (Rommel has won great praise for a similarly lengthy retreat from El Alamein to Tunisia, and he was pursued, if that is the proper word, by the cautious Montgomery, not the very aggressive Japanese).

Slim remained a corps commander for more than a year after the withdrawal from Burma. When the first, ill-advised British attempt to launch a counteroffensive into Burma ended in defeat, muddle and retreat early in 1943, Slim was brought in to stabilize the situation. He did so but, in the process, fell afoul of the Eastern Army commander, Lieut. Gen. Noel Irwin, who proposed to fire him. Trying to take Slim's job never proved healthy for anyone. When the dust settled, Irwin was on his way home to England and retirement, and Slim was driving along the Barrackpore road.

No Allied general of the war entered into quite so bleak and baffling an inheritance as Slim. British and Indian armies alike had been consistently beaten by the Japanese, and very often the Japanese had been outnumbered by the defenders they routed. The Fourteenth Army needed to be retrained, but above all it needed to be shown that it *could* win. When Montgomery assumed command of Eighth Army in August 1942, he knew that victory over Rommel was Churchill's first priority. Slim's army, indeed the entire theater, had a low priority for everything. In the war against Germany, the Allies Britain and America, however much they might argue about means, were agreed upon the end desired. In Burma, on the other hand, both ends and means were in dispute between the Allies. The Americans wanted to conquer just enough of Burma to reopen land communications with China. Churchill wanted to restore the Empire's prestige in Asia. China was relatively unimportant to him, but the same could not be said of the United States. The result was a command structure that can only be described as lunatic. It accorded a key role to symbol of American interest in China (and of disdain for imperial Britain), Lieut. Gen. Joseph Stilwell, who liked to refer to his British allies as pig something-or-others. Slim also had to cope with the special position of acting Maj. Gen. Orde Wingate, who was enjoying the patronage of Churchill and was fanatically convinced that his unorthodox "Long Range Penetration" tactics could reconquer not only Burma but all Southeast Asia. Wingate's view of the Indian Army was that it was "second rate."

To these problems could be added the appalling difficulties presented by climate, terrain, rampant tropical disease and supply difficulties calculated to make a logistician suicidal. Once all this had been overcome, there was the final matter of the Imperial Japanese Army, unbeaten in large-scale warfare in modern times. When Slim drove into Barrackpore that October day, he began the process of conjuring victory out of this witches' brew of problems.

The first task was to convince his troops they could win. Training, oriented to conditions in Burma (hitherto it had been based on the not particularly useful lessons drawn from the fighting in the Middle East) intensified. Better food, recreational facilities and medical care improved the morale of the "forgotten army," Slim, an Indian Army officer, knew that Indian troops were very different from British and could handle them appropriately. To British troops, this rumpled, almost magnetically ugly man became "Uncle Bill."

Above all Slim knew his army needed a victory. The Japanese and the DC-3 gave him what he needed. If any single piece of technology underpinned Slim's work in Burma it was the Douglas DC-3,

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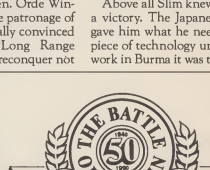

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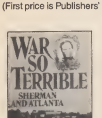

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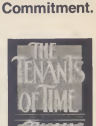

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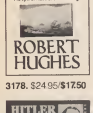

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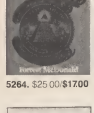

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the "Dakota" to the British. And if the Imperial Japanese Army contributed anything to its own downfall it was surely the inflexible tenacity with which its generals clung to their set objective. In February 1944, the Japanese opened an offensive in the Arakan coastal district of Burma, aimed at drawing in and using up Slim's reserves before the Japanese would set in motion a major assault on Imphal, hundreds of miles to the north and the base for any British counteroffensive into Burma. Slim understood their design and planned to turn it to his own advantage. He would break the Arakan offensive, giving his army the psychological boost it needed, then shift his weight north, fighting a defensive battle around Imphal to smash the enemy on ground of his own choosing before launching his own offensive into Burma. Few battles develop according to plan, but Slim's design can be traced in all the subsequent fighting.

The Japanese attacked in the Arakan with a reinforced division. Slim used nearly six divisions to defeat them. (He once remarked that using a piledriver on a walnut was acceptable if you had the piledriver and didn't much care what the walnut looked like afterwards.) The effect of the Arakan fighting on the morale of Fourteenth Army was electric. The invincible Japanese had been met, stopped and broken in the jungle. Meanwhile, Slim was directing the opening stages of the Imphal battle—a controlled withdrawal to the edge of the ring of hills surrounding the Imphal plain.

What linked the widely separated parts of this battle (the most complex conducted by an Allied army commander) was Slim's directing will—and the ubiquitous Dakota. The one held all the parts of the complex design in place; the other made it possible to sustain a cut-off division in the Arakan, transfer another from there to the Imphal front and finally to sustain the entire corps defending Imphal when the Japanese cut the road into the plain. The failure of the *Luftwaffe* to supply destroyed the isolated German Sixth Army at Stalingrad. As the obverse, the Dakota's ability to sustain the defense of Imphal ruined the Japanese 15th Army. Unbending in his determination to take his objective, the Japanese army commander lost 55,000 of his 80,000 men—and opened the door to Burma for Slim.

The Arakan-Imphal operation, vast as it was, was not the sum total of Slim's preoccupations. In north Burma, Stilwell was moving forward, covering the road-building effort that would again link China to the outside world. The coordination of his operations with Slim's should have been done by the Eleventh Army Group commander, General Sir George Giffard. Stilwell, however, loathed him. Slim was one of the few British generals he did not hate, so Slim did the coordinating.

Then there was Wingate. Commanding a force of almost corps size, Wingate was poised in February 1944 to launch Operation "THURSDAY." Every bit as ambitious as "*Market Garden*"—the famous "bridge too far"—in the claims made for its likely decisiveness, and even more complicated than that venture, it was also increasingly irrelevant once the Japanese were committed to *U-GO*, their Arakan-Imphal venture. Wingate, however, had too much high-level support for his operation to be aborted, so Slim had to oversee THURSDAY a strategic and tactical irrelevance that became an epic of courage. Slim all the while was cajoling the impossible Stilwell and defeating *U-GO*.

Slim was knighted on the Imphal plain in December 1944. By that time his armies were poised on the shores of Burma's mile-wide Irrawaddy River, preparing to launch the operation that would crown Slim's achievements. Fourteenth Army had gotten into the central Burma plain by pushing forward throughout the monsoon on the heels of the retreating Japanese. Lord Louis Mountbatten, supreme Allied com

Continued on page 65

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Run Down in Neutral Waters

Loaded with British seamen held as prisoners, the German tanker *Altmark* skittered northward for a haven in neutral Norwegian waters—and homeport in Germany. But the Royal Navy was looking everywhere for the late *Graf Spee's* notorious supply ship. It was a desperate race with helpless prisoners as the prospective prize.

By Robert Barr Smith

The German sea captain could breath easier. His big tanker, *Altmark* was in neutral waters, in a Norwegian fiord safe from her enemies out in the deep water off the coast. He was almost home. It was only a short run to Wilhelmshaven, and he could wait. The British could not keep ships outside his haven forever—when they left he would sail south, hugging the Norwegian coast, until, covered by the *Luftwaffe* from German bases, he could run across the narrow neck of the Baltic for home. He would bring back his ship and crew intact, and with them he would bring almost 300 British prisoners, officers and crew from ships sunk by the pocket-battleship *Graf Spee* early in the war.

It was February of 1940, dark and frigid, as *Altmark* lay in the fiord. She had left Germany in the summer that now seemed so very long ago, and many thousands of miles had passed beneath her keel since. Her warship, *Graf Spee*, had had success after success against British merchant ships in the far-flung shipping lanes of the South Atlantic, and had even crossed into the Indian Ocean to sink another merchantman.

But in December *Graf Spee's* luck had run out. She had reprovisioned from *Altmark* and headed west for the mouth of the mighty River Plate, the shipping artery that fed both Montevideo in Uruguay, and Buenos Aires, Argentina.

Spee had been at sea before war began. She and her sister-ship, *Deutschland*, had left Wilhelmshaven for the open sea, and their intended career as commerce-raiders. The Polish invasion was prepared and ready to go, and the Reichsmarine wanted its surface raiders far at sea before the first shot was fired, deep in their waiting areas near British shipping lanes.

Graf Spee left port on August 21, 1939, and *Deutschland* was three days behind her. Both ships, using darkness as best they could, sailed through the trackless seas north of the Faroes without being seen. Their support vessels, *Westerwald* for *Deutschland* and *Altmark* for *Graf Spee*, were already at sea. *Altmark* had sailed on August 6, traveling openly down the English Channel in the last sunny days of peace, bound for Port Arthur, Texas. There she filled her tanks with fuel, then turned south for the empty wastes of the South Atlantic, and her rendezvous with *Graf Spee*.

Captain Heinrich Dau of *Altmark* was not a pleasant man, nor one beloved by his crew. He was short, graying and wrinkled, sporting an old-style Imperial Navy beard and mustache. A petty tyrant, he was fond of exercising his authority, and given to constantly reminding his officers of his long experience. "A lifetime at sea," he would say, effectively discouraging suggestions from his subordinates.

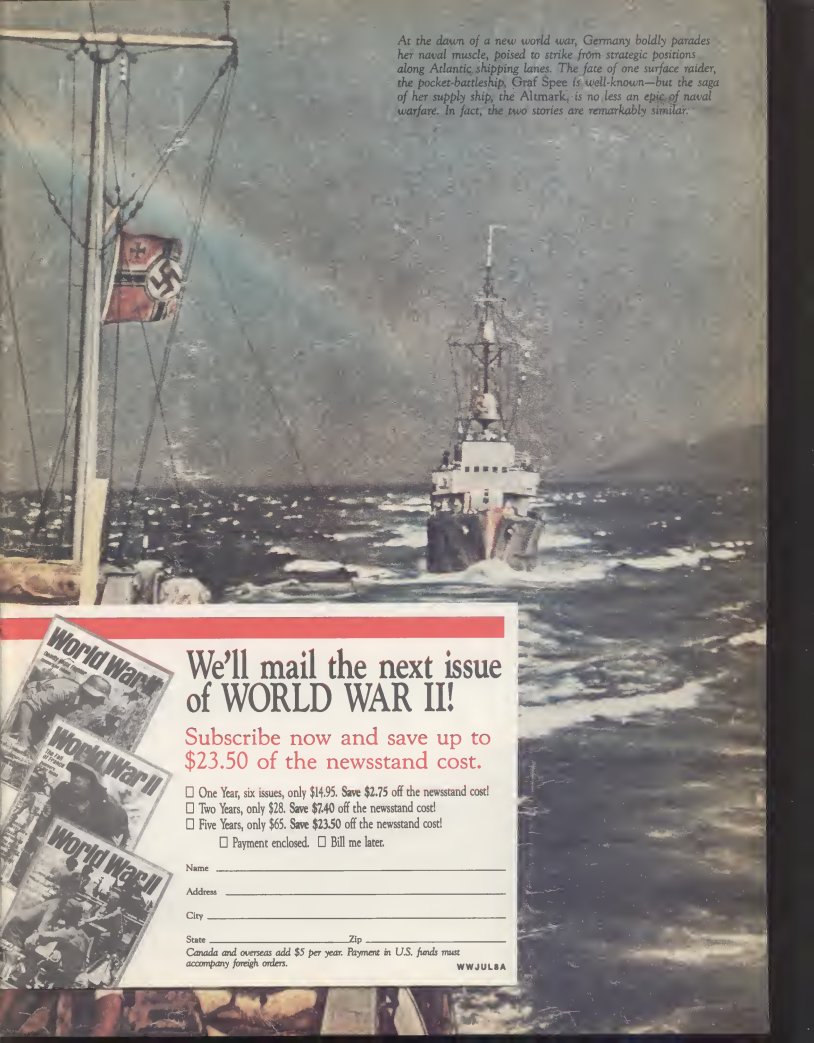
He and his officers were at dinner on Sunday, September 3, when the steward murmured softly to him, and the captain abruptly jumped up from the mess table and quickly left the room. He was back within minutes, waving a decoded radio message, and immediately gave orders to fall in the entire ship's company, pulling the men from their Sunday meal rather than wait even a few minutes. It was only then that *Altmark's* crew learned of their mission. They would not be sailing to Rotterdam as they had thought—instead, they were going to war.

"England and France have declared war," he announced with great drama. "The task which the *Führer* has selected for us is to act as the indispensable, floating supply base for a German battleship.

The response was silence. The crew was not anxious for war, especially not after the series of bloodless triumphs Hitler had achieved in the Rhineland, Austria, the Sudeten, and finally the rest of Czechoslovakia. But Dau, already in his mid-sixties, was apparently enthusiastic, and sure that the *Führer* was right again. He still vividly remembered the great days of the First World War, when he had commanded a frigate of the Imperial German Navy.

Dau immediately put the crew to work. *Altmark* was to be painted a light yellow, better suited to the harsh sunlight of the south. And she became the Norwegian *Sogne*, homeport Oslo, just as fast as her crew could paint in the new identity. Dau pushed south for a rendezvous point in the great blankness about midway between Trinidad and Dakar.

The meeting was easy. In fact, *Graf Spee* came up so suddenly, northwest of the Azores, that Dau at first thought she was a British man-of-war, and turned to run at *Altmark's* best 22-knot speed.



At the dawn of a new world war, Germany boldly parades her naval muscle, poised to strike from strategic positions along Atlantic shipping lanes. The fate of one surface raider, the pocket-battleship, Graf Spee is well-known—but the saga of her supply ship, the Altmark, *is no less an epic of naval warfare. In fact, the two stories are remarkably similar.*

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Run Down in Neutral Waters

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It was February of 1940, dark and fr
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seemed so very long ago, and many th
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But in December *Graf Spee's* luck h
reprovisioned from *Altmark* and heade
of the mighty River Plate, the shipping
Montevideo in Uruguay, and Buenos

Spee had been at sea before war bega
ship, *Deutschland*, had left Wilhelmsha
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Graf Spee left port on August 21, 1939
three days behind her. Both ships, using
could, sailed through the trackless sea
without being seen. Their support ve
Deutschland and *Altmark* for *Graf Spee*
Altmark had sailed on August 6, travel
English Channel in the last sunny day
Port Arthur, Texas. There she filled her
turned south for the empty wastes of th
her rendezvous with *Graf Spee*.

Captain Heinrich Dau of *Altmark* was not a pleasant man, nor one beloved by his crew. He was short, graying and wrinkled, sporting an old-style Imperial Navy beard and mustache. A petty tyrant, he was fond of exercising his authority, and given to constantly reminding his officers of his long experience. "A lifetime at sea," he would say, effectively discouraging suggestions from his subordinates.

He and his officers were at dinner on Sunday, September 3, when the steward murmured softly to him, and the captain abruptly jumped up from the mess table and quickly left the room. He was back within minutes, waving a decoded

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At the dawn of a new world war, Germany boldly parades her naval muscle, poised to strike from strategic positions along Atlantic shipping lanes. The fate of one surface raider, the pocket-battleship, Graf Spee is well-known—but the saga of her supply ship, the Altmark, *is no less an epic of naval warfare. In fact, the two stories are remarkably similar.*

Two months after the Altmark *episode, the fiord-studded Norwegian coastline remained the scene of savage confrontation in confined quarters. Here, the British destroyer* Hunter, *dead in the water from a German torpedo, is inadvertently rammed by the crippled* Hotspur *in fierce action at Narvik Harbor on April 10, 1940. In this action, two German and two British destroyers went down—and three days later, the British returned to sink eight more German destroyers.*

By September 13 the two ships reached the great emptiness in the center of the South Atlantic, about midway between South America and Africa, and there waited for orders. They had been fortunate; they were in position to strike at three different major shipping lanes, and the Royal Navy still had no idea they were there.

They had had one close call. On the 11th, *Spee's* Arado seaplane, out on a routine reconaissance flight, had spotted trouble. On a day of wonderful visibility, she had sighted the British *Cumberland*, an 8-inch-gun cruiser, on her way from Freetown, Sierra Leone, to Rio de Janiero. The Arado had turned away before the British lookouts saw that tiny dot in the sky and had warned *Spee* and *Altmark*. They had been able to turn out of *Cumberland's* way in plenty of time. *Spee* was much the more powerful ship, but *Cumberland* was faster, capable of hurting the pocket-battleship badly, and sure to warn other British warships in time for swift retaliation no matter what the outcome of any engagement that might between her and *Graf Spee*.

At last, on September 26, *Graf Spee* was released by orders from Berlin, to begin savaging British shipping up and down the South Atlantic. *Spee's* first victim, on the 30th, was the little tramp freighter *Clement*. She was the first of nine merchantmen *Spee* would send to the bottom.

But little *Clement* had ignored *Spee's* order not to use her radio and sent a clear message, pinpointing the raider's position before she died.

Hans Langsdorff, a gallant man, understood the Englishman's courage and strong sense of duty. They were brothers under the skin. The German could not know that *Clement's* message had sealed the fate of his ship.

Meanwhile, *Altmark* would have a scare on October 9, when she was seen southwest of the Cape Verde Islands by aircraft from the British carrier *Ark Royal*. But Captain Dau and his crew were fine actors, and persuaded the inquisitive pilots that *Altmark* was the American *Delmar*. The carrier and her aircraft could not know that *Delmar* was even then in New Orleans. *Spee's* supply ship would live a while longer.

On October 14, *Altmark* and *Spee* met again. Dau overflowed with fulsome accolades for Langsdorff, eloquently celebrating the sinking of *Clement* and three more British merchant ships. But Langsdorff, the old-line officer, had no time for flattery and Nazi slogans. He brushed aside the compliments and went directly to the point. He now had 150 captives aboard *Spee*; he could not keep them. They would be transferred to *Altmark*.

Dau was appalled. The prisoners numbered as many as his own crew. Why could not some other arrangement be made? Langsdorff was unmoved. *Spee* would transfer a small armed guard to help. But the prisoners would be held in *Altmark*, and that was that.

Dau held his peace; his orders were clear. But to the British merchant navy officers he was brusque, arrogant, rude. His hatred of everything British showed clearly. His crew, at least most of them, behaved to the captives with decency, even kindness, when their captain was not around, as had Langsdorff and the crew of *Spee*. By evening the prisoners were settled in steel store-rooms ranged vertically in *Altmark's* bow and stern, pillowed on heaps of carpet off-loaded from *Spee's* last victim, the freighter *Huntsman*. They knocked together their own latrines from old ammunition boxes and oil drums.

It was well they made themselves as comfortable as possible, and organized themselves with typical British discipline. They would remain in their cramped, airless steel prison for months to come.

Spee next left the South Atlantic to run around the Cape into the Indian Ocean, a move designed to convince the Royal Navy's searching ships that she had moved her area of operations. She sank only a single merchantman there, however, and the whole point of the move was lost shortly after her return to the shipping lanes off the coast of West Africa. For she fell in with the refrigerator ship *Doric Star*. This time, *Spee*

opened fire from long range, ordering her prey to keep radio silence as usual. But *Doric Star*'s courageous skipper and radio operator were not deterred. They sent their "raider" signal nevertheless, and the Admiralty would soon know *Spee* was back in the South Atlantic.

Aboard the *Altmark* life was uneventful, even dreary. Gradually the rations grew smaller as Dau economized. More serious for many of the captive seamen, the tobacco supply dwindled away. There would be no more. But the British seamen stuck together, and their discipline remained intact. One sailor, angered by the arrogance of a guard, hit him, and drew solitary confinement in a tiny tank set aside for the purpose, bread and water his only rations. Others were confined for other offenses, such as smoking in unauthorized places. But their spirits remained high. The worst enemy was boredom, followed closely by the dead stale air of the prison flats, and the lack of any real news.

And the crowding. As more and more prisoners were taken by *Spee*, the congestion became almost unbearable, until 299 merchant seamen were jammed into the prison flats. All of the captive crews were there, with the exception of a few ship's officers, who were retained on *Spee*. The stench, the foulness of the air, grew worse and worse by the day.

On December 6 the two German ships met again—for the last time, although neither commander could guess it. Langsdorff insisted on moving his last lot of prisoners into *Altmark*, much to Dau's dismay. And the battleship's commander commented that *Spee* needed an overhaul; he would contact Naval High Command for orders, recommending they return to Germany.

Dau was horrified. "It's up to the *Führer!*"

"Nonsense!" said Langsdorff. "It's up to the Grand Admiral. Erich Raeder knows these things. Only a sailor understands."

The exchange typified the two men: Langsdorff, the model German naval officer, no political fanatic, but a sailor; Dau, the passionate Nazi. That night, Dau would describe Langsdorff in his diary as a "defeatist."

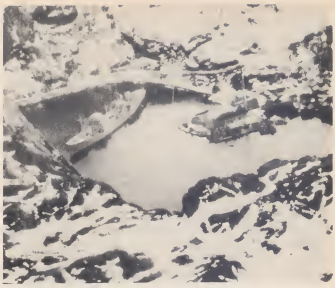
In the end, *Spee* steamed off westward, heading for the fateful estuary of the Plate, and the vital shipping lanes to and from Argentina and Uruguay.

Langsdorff had learned that a small British merchant convoy of four ships was to sail from Montevideo on December 10, a rich prize indeed. This time he would find, not a handful of defenseless merchant ships, but the Royal Navy, pugnacious and ready.

Admiral Graf Spee was a pocket-battleship, built to run from almost any battleship with a punch greater than her 11-inch guns. Her own ordnance and armor were much heavier than that of any cruiser fast enough to catch her. She had a cruising range of some 10,000 miles, infinitely extended by resupply from *Altmark*. She had been designed as a commerce raider, but now she would have to fight for her life on this brilliantly clear early morning of December 13th, 1939.

For *Kapitaen-zur-See* Langsdorff was about to meet a seadog in the finest British tradition. Commodore Henry Harwood led three cruisers, searching for his raider-quarry, and his orders were to disable or destroy her at any cost. The blood of Britain ran through her arteries at sea, and no price was too high to keep those vital lines open. Harwood knew he would fight against odds. His two small cruisers, *Ajax* and *Achilles*, carried only 6-inch guns; they really were only big destroyers. His only real cruiser, *Exeter*, was armed with an 8-inch main battery. But neither she nor her smaller consorts could hope to stand up to hits from *Spee*'s 11-inch guns. Their armor would not bear it. Nor were their guns liable to hurt *Spee* very badly: the conbined broadside weight of all three British ships was little more than half that of *Spee*. Harwood's only assets were speed—and four centuries of tradition.

Nevertheless, Harwood cleared for action and closed.



TOP: Like a bathtub toy, the Altmark *waits out her final ignominious hours as supply vessel-turned-prison ship. Later an embarrassed Reich will change her name. MIDDLE: The* Cossack, *with British seamen rescued from the* Altmark, *glides triumphantly into a Scottish port. ABOVE: With an equally festive air, waving crewmen of the* Graf Spee, *formerly supplied by the* Altmark, *ride an Argentine tugboat to Buenos Aires after being interned.*

The little ships, *Ajax* and *Achilles*, fought as one unit, and *Exeter* as another. This tactic forced Langsdorff to shift his fire and allowed the two units to observe the fall of each other's projectiles, a considerable help to their relatively inefficient ranging equipment. *Exeter* bore the brunt of *Graf Spee's* main battery fire, and she suffered heavily, until she was firing with only a single turret and her wounded captain was steering with only a portable small-boat compass.

But in the end it was Langsdorff who turned away, pursued by the two small cruisers. Their 6-inch shells bounced off the main armor of *Spee*, although their repeated hits caused casualties and damage to her superstructure and secondary armament. And although he had avoided two salvos of torpedoes from *Exeter*, Langsdorff knew *Ajax* and *Achilles* also carried torpedoes. And so he ran for the estuary of the Plate, followed by *Ajax* and *Achilles*.

Battered *Exeter* turned south for Port Stanley in the Falklands, and from Stanley the 8-inch cruiser *Cumberland* steamed hard north to replace her off the Plate. Still shadowed by the small cruisers, *Spee* sailed up the broad river. She was safe in neutral Uruguay, and she could seek the repairs she needed. But outside, in the swells of the Atlantic, Harwood would be waiting. *Cumberland* would be there, fresh, undamaged, with her full load of ammunition. And other heavy units were on the way. If they could not reach the mouth of the Plate in time to meet *Spee* on her way out, they might at least make certain she would not get far if she escaped the waiting cruisers.

But *Spee* would not come out. She could make such repairs as were possible within her own resources, but Montevideo's shipyard would not help her. Neither could Langsdorff leave immediately, even had he wished to. For international law required that no belligerent ship could leave a neutral port within 24 hours of a merchant ship flying her adversary's colors. The British minister in Montevideo was prepared to send out British merchantmen then in port, one at a time, 24 hours apart, to keep *Spee* in port. But the Uruguayan government solved the problem by ordering *Spee* to leave port not later than the evening of the 17th.

Langsdorff asked Berlin for instruction. All he got was an answer that dumped the problem back on him. The only clear instruction was to avoid internment at all costs. At the last, poor Langsdorf elected to scuttle his beautiful ship in the estuary of the Plate. Vast crowds lined the river as *Spee* steamed slowly toward the sea, apparently headed for a renewal of the battle. At sea, the Royal Navy cleared for action. But Langsdorff, in an agony of heart, took off his crew and blew up the *Graf Spee* in the middle of the river.

Three days later, the gallant Langsdorff wrapped himself in the ensign of the German Navy and shot himself.

And now Dau, alone, had to decide his own course of action. He ignored Langsdorff's order to land the British prisoners in some neutral port. Although he had 299 aboard, and they had to be constantly guarded by his own men and the armed party from *Spee*, Dau decided that landing his prisoners anywhere would allow the British to learn his ship's whereabouts. He could not take that chance. His only hope now lay in remaining invisible, far from the vigilant eyes of the Royal Navy.

So Dau turned south, sailing into the trackless vastness of the South Atlantic, far from any shipping lanes, and thus presumably far from the weathered gray ships of his enemy. He stayed in his oceanic wilderness for five weeks.

Dau kept his crew busy. The crew of the *Altmark* overhauled her engines as best they could, but the boredom and frustration grew. Small arguments between prisoners grew easily into shouting-matches and fights. A British captain, brought before Dau to complain about the miserable conditions in which his men had to live, was given five days' solitary confinement simply for complaining, and had to be restrained from attacking the pompous captain. But at last both crew and prisoners could feel something in the air, a sense of expectation. At last the engines were reassembled, and *Altmark* test-fired her machineguns and light cannon. The signs were unmistakable: *Altmark* was going to run for home. British spirits rose; they knew the Royal Navy would be waiting.

The voyage back would be fraught with danger for *Altmark*, even though the British were hard-pressed at sea all over the world. Dau knew where the points of greatest danger were. So did the captive officers. In fact, they were marked down in the prison decks on a life-boat chart, kept hidden from German eyes by the pin-up girl drawn on the other side of the page.

On January 22, 1940, Dau turned north, staying far from the shipping routes, and crossing the equator on the 31st, still unseen. Now, pushing hard, Dau headed for home. He could not steam up the English Channel. It was a British lake. The road home had to be the long, hard way, north through the Atlantic far west of the British Isles, then east into the North Sea, and finally south to one of Germany's Baltic ports. The shortest route west was between the Orkneys and the Shetlands, or between the Shetlands and the storm-haunted Faroes. But those routes were too dangerous, covered as they were by British air and naval patrols. So Dau wisely opted for that wilderness of terrible storm and almost perpetual stygian gloom between the Faroes and far-off Iceland, deep in the long Arctic night.

Dau was lucky and a fine sailor, to boot. Using the foul weather and the long nights, he made his turn safely between

TRIGGER FOR AN INVASION

The British boarding of the German supply ship *Altmark* in neutral Norwegian waters, seemingly a small event in the overall context of World War II, had far-reaching impact for the leading actors in the global drama still unfolding in early 1940.

Until now, for instance, Hitler had seen events go his way, by his plan, without significant interference by outside forces or factors. The occupation of the Rhineland, the march into Czechoslovakia, the annexation of Austria, the invasion of Poland—all had been pieces that fell into place without undue strain. Even the Soviet giant to the east had been placated and brought into line as an "ally."

Plans for the invasion of France and the Low Countries were well underway, and Norway simply could be dealt with later. . . some other day.

Flanking Germany to the north, Norway as strictly a neutral might be a tolerable neighbor to the aggression-prone Nazi state, but many in Hitler's highest councils feared that Norway was a tempting target for British seizure. That would threaten Germany's access to the North Sea and the Atlantic. It also would endanger the flow of Swedish iron ore, a vital commodity for the Nazi war machine, down the Leads, or coastal waters, of neutral Norway's western shores.

Norway's place in the scheme of things loomed even larger when Winston Churchill, head of the British Admiralty, broadcast his strong appeal in January for Europe's neutral nations to join the struggle against the evil man in Germany. Churchill, not yet Prime Minister, already rankled.

"Churchill's broadcasts used to make Hitler angry," reported Field Marshal Gerd von Rundstedt after the war.

"They got under his skin—as did Roosevelt's later. Hitler repeatedly ar-

the Faroes and Iceland, far to the north of Great Britain, still unseen, and coming closer to home each storm-tossed day.

Rough seas, cold weather: *Altmark*, empty of fuel, rolled badly in the big seas of the North Atlantic. Her luck had held, and the hopes of the British prisoners steadily declined. Only one obstacle lay ahead of her now: the run south down the Norwegian coast. If deliverance for the prisoners was to come, it would have to come quickly.

But at that moment, at the Royal Navy's desolate base near Rosyth in the Firth of Forth, a party from cruiser *Aurora* was boarding the sleek destroyer-flotilla leader *Cossack*, short-handed from a flu epidemic. *Cossack* was making ready for sea, and would fill her complement to strength any way she had to. And the men from *Aurora* knew there might be something different about this trip, for they carried steel helmets, rifles, bayonets and web equipment.

They got their orders from *Cossack's* first officer, Lieutenant-Commander Bradwell Talbot Turner, a tall, quiet officer who looked more like an Oxford don than a typical seaman. But his words were crisp and plain. He instructed them precisely on two alternate plans to board *Altmark*, one from small boats, the other directly from the deck of *Cossack*. They learned their assigned places and duties and were sent below.

Cossack put to sea, leading her flotilla of destroyers *Sikh*, *Nubian*, *Ivanhoe*, and *Intrepid*. In company was the cruiser *Arethusa*. The official mission was "ice patrol" in the Skagerrak, but that was only a cover story. They were looking for *Altmark*, and on the bridge of *Cossack* Captain Philip Vian, tough, lean and aggressive, was determined.

Time was short. *Altmark* had made the Norwegian coast and turned southeast along it. She was in neutral waters at last. On February 14, Dau was awakened from a restless catnap to be told that a Norwegian torpedo-boat had signaled *Altmark* to stop. It was little *Trygg*, and she put an officer aboard. But his inspection was a gesture only, and he courteously accepted Dau's lies that *Altmark* carried neither prisoners nor weapons. He even put a Norwegian sailor on board, to act as pilot until a regular pilot could be obtained, farther down the coast at Alesund.

Dau indeed found pilots at Alesund, but aboard with them came another Norwegian naval officer, asking the same questions again. This time, the British prisoners spotted him coming aboard, and the captive seamen began to beat on the doors, bulkheads and latrine drums with chunks of wood, shoes, and even fists. A party of the younger men ripped a steel girder from the bulkhead and began to smash it against the heavy woooden hatch cover overhead. Hungry and worn out as they were, they kept it up until the hatch began to splinter and a hole started to appear in it. When a German guard sat on the cover to help keep it in place, one Englishman seized a jagged tin can and stabbed the German in the seat, sending him springing off the hatchcover. The girder-party carried on the bashing.

The uproar was tremendous, but the Norwegian, in Dau's cabin, did not react. The German crew ran every winch on the ship in an attempt to drown out the racket, and finally the prisoners were driven down into the prison decks with fire hoses and rifle butts. The Norwegian returned to his ship, and Dau spitefully put the prisoners on bread and water.

Altmark was stopped twice more by Norwegian vessels, their commanders mainly concerned that Dau did not pass Norway's Bergen naval base in darkness. Both times the same questions were asked and answered as before, but no search was made. However, Dau was forced to turn farther to sea, away from Bergen, although he still retained Norwegian pilots. The prisoners ate their biscuits and water in angry silence. The German guards were afraid to go below decks; they could feel the hatred all around them.

But *Altmark's* phenomenal luck had begun to change. Just after noon on February 16, a British Coastal Command Hudson bomber saw her running close to the coast and immediately radioed her position. And the call was happily monitored in *Cossack*. Vian turned hard for the Norwegian coast.

Altmark steamed on to the south, well inside neutral waters. The original Hudson had gone home, her fuel running out. But now there were three more aircraft in her place, circling above *Altmark*.

And in mid-afternoon *Altmark's* lookouts called down that they could see the masts of warships, closing fast. Soon they were visible to everyone on *Altmark's* decks: *Arethusa*, sleek And deadly, and her covey of destroyers. Dau turned and ran farther into Norwegian waters, headed for the cover of neutral territory. The Norwegian pilots smiled.

Dau still had reason for optimism. He was nearly home, thanks to the weather, his own seamanship, and the democracies' adherence to the letter of the law while Europe caught fire around them. Soon he would be within the *Lutfwaffe's* range, and the rest would be comparatively simple.

But down on the Mall in London, just a very brief walk from Trafalgar Square, an extraordinary man thought otherwise. The First Lord of the Admiralty, Winston Spencer Churchill, was cast from the same mold that had produced the sickly little admiral who had won the seas for Britain almost a century and a half before. In Trafalgar Square Haoratio Nelson's statue stood almost thoughtfully on its tall pillar, high above the brooding lions. One-armed, one-eyed, he would never have let a matter of "paper neutrality" stop him from doing what he thought best for his beloved England. It was he, after all, who at the battle of

gued to the Army High Command, especially over Norway, that if he did not move first, the British would—and establish themselves in such neutral points."

Early in the year, Hitler did order his generals to draw up plans for an invasion of Norway . . . just in case. In fact, though, Norway was presenting itself as the first major event of his recent career that was *not* subject to his own plans.

As the British historian B. H. Liddell Hart put it: "The invasion of Norway in April 1940 was the first of Hitler's aggressive moves that was not premeditated . . . he was led into it unwillingly, more by fear than by desire, under the combined influence of persuasion and provocation. Although he achieved this conquest with ease, he was no longer in control of his own course."

Before the seizure of Norway in April, however, came the *Altmark* incident in mid-February. For Hitler, that settled his decision. "The British attack on the *Altmark*," reported one German admiral after the war, "proved decisive, in its effect on Hitler—it was the 'fuse' that touched off the Norwegian offensive."

Did Hitler then turn to the plans his High Command had been ordered to draw up earlier? No—always one to play both men and nations against one another, he called forth a little-known general and Poland veteran, Nikolaus von Falkenhorst, and gave him all of five hours to develop an invasion plan. Repairing to a hotel with a travel guide, and nothing else by way of preparation, von Falkenhorst did produce the plan that was used.

The same Falkenhorst, Commander-in-Chief of German forces in Norway until 1944, was sentenced to death by a British military tribunal after the war for his role in the execution of British commandos taken as prisoners of war. The sentence later was commuted to a 20-year prison term, but Falkenhorst was released in 1953 for health reasons. He died in Germany 15 years later.

Never again to rendezvous with the Altmark, *the dreaded raider* Graf Spee *rides at anchor with deceptive calm in Montevideo (note fake bow-wake, designed to give British submarines a false impression of her speed).*

Copenhagen put his blind eye to his telescope during the hottest of the fighting, and then blandly announced that he could not see the faint-hearted signal to withdraw raised by his superior. He had gone on to win. And so would the square-jawed bulldog at the Admiralty this day.

The time for decision had come. Two British destroyers had gone into the coastal waters after *Altmark*, but as the gray ships closed in, the Norwegian torpedoboats *Kjell* and *Skarv* steamed close alongside *Altmark*, and the destroyers could not stop or board her. Dau turned his ship into Jossing Fiord, one of the tremendous deep-water gorges that push back into the Norwegian mainland.

Altmark was still free, but she was in a trap. She crunched through the drifting ice of Jossing Fiord, her captain only too aware that the Royal Navy had plugged the only exit behind him. For the moment, *Altmark* was safe. The two Norwegian gunboats lay near him in the fiord. But Dau, who had several times criticized Langsdorff for allowing *Spee* to be trapped in the Plate, was now well-stoppered himself. One of the gunboats approached him and again asked whether he carried British prisoners. As before, Dau lied, and the little Norwegian returned to her anchorage. Darkness settled over Jossing Fiord.

After dark, Captain Vian took *Cossack* in close to the coast. He advised the senior Norwegian officer present of the British belief that *Altmark* carried British prisoners. However, that officer replied that he had orders to resist any British attempt to capture *Altmark*, and Vian signaled the Admiralty for instructions. Churchill's response came within three hours, and could not have been more plain: "Unless Norwegian torpedoboat undertakes to convoy *Altmark* to Bergen with a joint Anglo-Norwegian guard on board and a joint escort, you should board *Altmark*, liberate the prisoners and take possession of ship—Suggest to Norwegian captain that honour is served by submitting to superior force."

The orders were precisely what Captain Vian wanted. It would take about 20 minutes to run into the fiord and alongside *Altmark*. "Right," said Vian quietly, "we're going in." The quiet, scholarly Turner called his men together, silent and armed to the teeth, to give the age-old order: "Stand by to board." There was nothing more to be said—the men checked their weapons and found their places on *Cossack's* deck. Her weapons trained and her railings down, the destroyer pushed in under the lowering gloom of the Norwegian coast, the black waters lit by a full moon.

Cossack was one of the powerful Tribal Class destroyers, commissioned, like her 15 sisters, in 1937. Her turbines generated some 44,000 shaft-horsepower, enough to drive her sleek 1,900 tons at 36 knots. She carried eight 4.7-inch guns, sundry lighter weapons, and four torpedo tubes. But her heavy weaponry would not fire a shot this night: she would do what she had to do as it had been done in Nelson's time, in the days of wooden ships and iron men.

Dau ran wearily to the bridge, his eyes still sticky with sleep. At first he thought the slim black shape was another Norwegian, especially when she stopped to hail and talk to one of the little gunboats. He turned his searchlight on her and hailed her. No reply. But now she came on, moving slowly but very surely toward him through the drifting ice. It was a little after 11:00, and there was no longer any doubt. "*Ein Englander*," said Dau, and gave orders to go astern and ram the destroyer.

But Vian had thought ahead of the German and pivoted *Cossack* neatly, avoiding the much larger tanker, slipping most of the force of the blow while keeping the ships close together. Turner, standing by with his party to board over *Cossack's* starboard side, quickly moved his men to port, next to *Altmark*. Now he turned to them and shouted: "Come on, then, what the hell are you waiting for!", and hurled himself onto *Altmark's* deck, revolver in hand. A few of the party were able to jump behind him before the gap between the ships widened, and Vian quickly maneuvered *Cossack* tightly against the German's side, so the rest of the boarders could follow.

There was firing now, as some of *Spee's* guard raised their rifles, and the British boarders shot them down. Other boarders pushed on deeper into the tanker, using their rifle butts to scatter the crew. One sailor smashed a German to the deck with his revolver, splintering the butt into a dozen pieces. Another looked up at the bridge wing in time to see a German aiming his rifle. The Englishman lunged hard upward with his bayonet, and his enemy screamed and fell. *Altmark*, still running in reverse after her unsuccessful attempt to ram, grounded on the rocks, and on her bridge Dau, the pugnacious Nazi, surrendered without a fight. Elsewhere on *Altmark*, the fighting died away. It was over.

But not quite. Below, the prisoners waited in an agony of apprehension. They had felt the shock as the two ships ground together, and heard the shooting and the sound of running feet and shouting voices. They could only guess at the outcome of the battle above their dark steel pen. At last they could hear the hatch being opened, and see the dark outline of heads against the gloom of the night above them.

In the cold Norwegian night, Turner leaned over the edge of the hatch, peering down into the blackness of the hold. He shouted into the darkness: "Any British down there?"

He was answered by a roar from 299 throats: "Yes! We're all British!"

"Come up, then," said Turner. "The Navy's here."

The prisoners left *Altmark* quickly, crossing to *Cossack* on a gangway Vian had thoughtfully rigged. There was need for haste: one German had falsely told the boarding party that *Altmark* was rigged with scuttling charges, set to explode at midnight. For all that, the merchant seamen left in joy, dancing and laughing. One man took a moment to knock out a particularly obnoxious German guard; another plaintively asked a *Cossack* officer for his revolver, in order to shoot Dau. But most were simply too happy to care, happy just to be back on a British deck, out of the stench and darkness and stale air of their prison.

At last, Vian recalled his boarding party, and just before midnight *Cossack* moved slowly out of Jossing Fiord. Below decks, with its traditional practicality, the Navy was already beginning to feed the ex-prisoners their first good meal in many months. Their ordeal was over.

"The Navy's here!" Those words were quoted in the British papers, and in that bleak winter provided a delicious ra-

tion of good cheer at home. *Altmark*'s prisoners came ashore at Leith on the 17th, to a tumultuous welcome.

Norway protested at length to the British government, but her sensibilities were soothed to some extent by the discovery that *Altmark*, contrary to Dau's protestations, had had prisoners aboard—and weapons, a fact she had also lied about. In any case there was little time for Norway to mull over the violation of her neutrality by *Cossack*: on the 9th of April Hitler not only violated her neutrality, with his new blitzkrieg tactics but seized without warning her whole country and people.

Altmark finally returned to Germany, reaching Kiel on March 28. She had lost seven dead, six wounded badly and five less so. Propaganda Minister Josef Goebbels did what he could to minimize Germany's embarrassment, raving at length about British "piracy." Dau was retired immediately, and poor *Altmark*, which like her captain had done a pretty fair job, was renamed *Uckermark*, as if to expunge the memory of the Jossing Fiord.

The tanker would sail again as a supply ship until, on November 30, 1942, she blew up in Yokohama Bay, taking with her the raider *Thor* and another storeship. Fifty-three men died with her, many of them part of the original crew. About 50 more were badly hurt by the blast. The official explanation of the explosion attributed it to gasoline vapor, but the odor of sabotage has clung to the incident ever since the former *Altmark*, like the *Graf Spee*, blew up.

Dau committed suicide in May 1945, apparently unwilling to survive the defeat of Germany. Most of his British prisoners returned to sea; some survived the war; many, sadly, did not. At least two became German prisoners again, meeting once more in a prison camp in Germany.

Cossack would go on to greater glory. She fought brilliantly in the British sorties into Narvik, where ten big German destroyers were sunk or wrecked beyond repair. *Cossack* was badly damaged in that fight, but would sail again. She played a leading part in the successful hunt for the German superbattleship *Bismarck*. Still leading the 4th Destroyer Flotilla, commanded by the redoubtable Captain Vian, she was in at the kill, sending at least one torpedo into the mighty *Bismarck*. She died finally as she had lived, torpedoed and sunk in the Atlantic in 1941.

Captain Vian, the quintessential seadog, went on to command larger forces in the Mediterranean. On the afternoon of March 22, 1942, his small force of light cruisers and destroyers, covering a critical convoy to Malta, fought a brilliant action against a force of Italian heavy cruisers and a battleship covered by dozens of aircraft. All Vian had to counter the 15-inch, 8-inch, and 6-inch guns of the Italian Navy were the 5.25s of his small cruisers and the 4.7s of his destroyers. Nevertheless, he stayed between the attackers and the convoy, his little ships darting in and out of their own smoke screen. Their daring and aggressiveness saved the convoy.

In later days, Vian commanded even larger formations, finishing the war in command of a carrier group in the Pacific. He retired at last in 1952 as Admiral of the Fleet Sir Philip Vian, rich in well-deserved rewards.

The boarding of *Altmark* was a brilliant flash of the old tradition, a proof, if one was needed, that if equipment had changed dramatically since Nelson's day, men had not changed at all. If the ships were no longer wooden, the men were still iron. □

Law Professor Robert Barr Smith is director of legal research and writing at the University of Oklahoma's College of Law. As further reading, please try Action This Day *by Philip Vian, skipper of the* Cossack. The Altmark Affair *by Frischauer and Jackson, or* Battle of the River Plate *by Benner.*

TOP AND MIDDLE: The Graf Spee's *farflung trail of victories touches two oceans before ending at Montevideo, while the* Altmark's *baptism by fire spans a single fiord. ABOVE: In fog-shrouded finale, the* Cossack, *boarding parties ready, forces her way alongside. In a final twist of irony, the captains of both the* Altmark *and the* Graf Spee *committed suicide. The* Cossack *went on to greater glory in the British sorties into Narvik, and was in on the kill when the German super battleship* Bismarck *was sunk in 1941.*

Where Devils Collide

As the British Red Devils parachuted or *glidered* in for the seizure of a key bridge in Sicily, they had no idea that the German Green Devils, also airborne, had dropped into the same neighborhood just beforehand. The result was the war's only battle between opposing airborne forces.

By Carlo W. D'Este

Largely unknown and unremembered except by its participants, the battle was at the site of an ugly, nondescript steel bridge. And it was here, on the northern edge of the strategically important plain of Catania, that the decisive battle of the Sicily campaign was fought in mid-July 1943. Here, the only battle of World War II between opposing airborne forces took place—between the Red Devils of the British 1st Airborne Division and the Green Devils of the German 1st Parachute Division.

On July 10, the Allies had launched the largest amphibious operation ever undertaken (only the later invasion of Normandy was larger). General Bernard Montgomery's British Eighth Army landed on the southeast coast around Syracuse, while Lieut. Gen. George S. Patton's American Seventh Army invaded the south coast. At Gela the British 1st Infantry Division fought off a determined German counterattack by the Herman Göring Division, but with minor exceptions the British landing forces met little resistance and within hours they were driving inland and north toward Augusta. By the morning of July 12, Lieut. Gen. Miles Dempsey's XIII Corps was poised to capture the vital plain of Catania, dominated at its northern edge by the towering, volcanic Mount Etna.

Italian resistance was scant and wholly ineffective, leaving as the only Axis opposition between the British and their goal of Messina a battle group of the Herman Göring Division, commanded by Colonel Wilhelm Schmalz. Most of the British transport was still at sea, and Dempsey's spearhead—Maj. Gen. Sidney Kirkman's 50th (Northumbrian) Division—was largely on foot, its troops exhausted after marching nearly 40 miles (in temperatures often exceeding 100 degrees) in less than two days.

The absence of serious resistance during the first crucial 48 hours prompted Montgomery to attempt a two-pronged offensive: a main thrust up the coast to seize the plain of Catania and a secondary drive inland by a XXX Corps tank-infantry task force.

The XXX Corps advance was soon thwarted by the Herman Göring Division at Vizzini and had to be abandoned, causing Montgomery to focus his attention upon the XIII Corps effort. In addition to the Corps' two infantry divisions and an independent armored brigade, the Eighth Army commander had in reserve the 1st Airborne Division, which was on standby near Kairouan, Tunisia.

The key to the Axis defense of eastern Sicily was the northern edge of the plain of Catania, terrain that favored a defender. With the river Simeto flowing from the mountains of central Sicily to the Gulf of Catania, the foothills of Mount Etna became obstacles to British offensive operations. The only road connecting the port cities of eastern Sicily was Route 114, which ran from Messina to Augusta, Syracuse and the south coast.

Five miles south of Catania the highway crosses the Simeto at a dot on the map called Ponte Primosole, which at the time of the Allied invasion was guarded by a small force of Italian troops and several antiquated antitank guns.

Montgomery's plan was as simple as it was audacious—during the full moon the night of July 13-14, an airborne brigade was to parachute onto drop zones around Primosole Bridge, followed soon after by a small, glider-borne force carrying two troops of light artillery (10 guns). At the same hour, No. 3 Commando (Regiment) would land by sea and capture the important bridge at Malati, which spans the Lentini River three miles north of the city of Lentini on Route 114. While these forces held the two bridges, the 50th Division was to thrust rapidly north, capture Lentini, and race the remaining eight miles to Primosole Bridge. En route the 50th would relieve the Commandos and, at the Simeto, the paratroops, who were there to help establish a bridgehead north of the river by nightfall, July 14. The following day this powerful airborne-infantry armored force would complete the operation by seizing Catania.

Without German reinforcement, there then was nothing

A German machine-gunner grimly anticipates an Allied landing. Actually, on Sicily, the war's second-largest amphibious assault met little resistance—the pivotal action was a unique battle between two airborne units, German and British, at an ugly, nondescript bridge.

TOP: The assault on Sicily's coast was second in scope only to Normandy, shown here from a U.S. cruiser. MIDDLE: At Sicily, a British Bren carrier goes ashore in a landing supported by more than 3,200 ships of almost every conceivable type. ABOVE: An armored unit moves in while British soldiers pass along needed ammunition canisters.

to prevent the rapid capture of Messina, the Axis lifeline to mainland Italy. In short order, the Sicily campaign could be ended in dramatic fashion.

At midday July 13, General Kirkman reported to Montgomery, who ordered the 50th Division to spearhead the drive "with all possible speed" to insure the airborne were relieved early the next day. To accomplish this mission the 50th Division was to punch its way through Schmalz's battle group, which was fighting a skillful delaying action in the rocky hills south of Lentini, and advance nearly 30 miles in less than 24 hours to Primosole Bridge. For the operation, the 50th Division would be reinforced by the newly arrived 4th Armored Brigade.

The task of seizing Primosole Bridge fell to Brigadier Gerald Lathbury's 1st Parachute Brigade. His plan called for Lieut. Col. Alastair "Jock" Pearson's 1st Battalion to carry out a *coup de main* north and south of the bridge, while Lieut. Col. E.C. Yeldham's 3rd Battalion landed some 1,000 yards north to establish defenses as a counter to any enemy reaction from Catania. Lieutenant Colonel John D. Frost's 2nd Battalion was assigned to secure the high ground south of the river where three small but vitally important hills—code-named Johnny I, II, and III—controlled all access to the river-crossing from that direction.

While the British were busy preparing for the operation, however, the Germans were responding with reinforcements to the beleaguered Schmalz. From the moment of the Sicily invasion, the German High Command placed its most powerful mobile reserve, the 30,000 highly trained airborne troops of *Fliegerkorps XI*, on full alert. Lieutenant General Richard Heidrich, commander of the 1st Parachute Division, was immediately summoned to Rome by the German C-in-C, Field Marshal Albert Kesselring, and told his division was being committed to Sicily. As events were to prove, Kesselring made the right choice. The blunt-jawed, cigar-smoking Heidrich, who was proud of his resemblance to Churchill, commanded a veteran division that was later praised by British General Sir Harold Alexander, commander of the 15th Army Group in Sicily, as "the best soldiers in the world."

The German plan was to dispatch Colonel Ludwig Heilmann's 3rd Parachute Regiment [*Fallschirmjäger Regiment 3 (FJR 3)*]as an advance guard, followed by the machine-gun battalion and a signal company. These units would soon be joined by engineers, the antitank units and finally by the 1st and 4th Parachute Regiments.

About midnight July 11, Heidrich telephoned Heilmann and came straight to the point: his regiment was to spearhead the reinforcement of Sicily. "You will personally reconnoiter the landing zone. The Field-Marshal [Kesselring] will provide you with a swift combat aircraft. . . .Conduct yourself according to the situation. We ourselves don't know what is going on over there. Good luck."

Heilmann and two staff officers departed early the next morning, and as their aircraft approached Catania they could see the city under Allied air attack. Thick clouds of black smoke rose into the morning air, and marauding RAF fighters forced their pilot to fly low in the Etna foothills to avoid detection. Catania airfield was pitted with fresh, smoking craters from the recent air attack, forcing the pilot to make a landing so difficult that Heilmann described it as "a work of art."

A drop zone was located just west of Primosole Bridge, it so happened—and there was barely time to telephone the coordinates before *FJR 3* took off for Sicily. En route the He 111 troop carriers were attacked by 20 P-38 Lightnings over the Strait of Messina—disaster was averted only when low fuel forced the U.S. planes back to their North African bases.

Heilmann's first hours in Sicily had been anything but encouraging. The first sight that greeted him was a steady

stream of Italian soldiers fleeing toward Catania. The *Luftwaffe* was not to be seen, and while acknowledging the bravery of the German airmen, Heilmann wondered why they seemed to be everywhere *but* Sicily. Hope was followed by anger, for in the end, Heilmann knew his men needed a miracle to successfully land in Sicily.

The answer to his prayers came when the Allied air force went home for dinner! Instead of having to parachute in the midst of an aerial attack, *FJR 3* was permitted to drop unmolested. Not for the first time the Allied habit of predictability cost an opportunity to destroy a major enemy force.

The 1,400 troops of *FJR 3* made a near-perfect jump, despite high winds blowing from the Gulf of Catania. There were few injuries, and within minutes of landing, Heilmann and his men rendezvoused with their transport and were en route to Lentini to reinforce Schmalz. Their mission was to defend the sector through which the British XIII Corps would have to advance to reach Primosole Bridge.

The following day—July 13—the 1st Parachute Machine Gun Battalion airlanded at Catania airfield in the midst of yet another Allied air raid. The CO ordered his battalion south toward Primosole Bridge while he drove to the *FJR 3* Command Post to confer with Heilmann, who told him: "Something is bound to happen tonight. The enemy will try to sneak through to the Catania plain, and to do it, he'll send in more troops—either by sea or by air. If he manages to land them in our rear and to dig in, then we're cut off for sure. So your battalion will remain south of Catania. *Hold the bridge over the Simeto.*"

The German gunners dug in 2,000 meters south of Primosole Bridge on the edge of an orange grove on the west side of Route 114 and awaited developments. The unexpected showdown between the Green Devils and the Red Devils was not long in coming.

The timely arrival of *FJR 3* enabled Schmalz of the Göring Division to take advantage of his new strength to gain additional time south of Lentini at the very moment when the British XIII Corps launched its drive north to relieve Primosole Bridge. There was heavy fighting on July 13—the Germans made each British gain a costly affair.

Kirkman demanded still more of his exhausted troops by continuing to attack throughout the night, but by the morning of July 14 the 50th Division was still well south of Lentini, and its slow progress was seriously endangering both the paratroopers at Primosole and the Commandos deployed at Malati Bridge.

The German airborne reinforcements had gone undetected, and the Commandos expected only token Italian resistance. Instead, they ran headlong into Heilmann's paratroops. Equally ominous was the presence on the high ground between the landing site and Lentini of an armored-infantry battalion of the Herman Göring Division. From the time of their landing until reaching the Malati Bridge at about 3 a.m. on July 14, the Commandos were engaged in constant firefights. The first element to reach the bridge was commanded by Major Peter Young and it quickly routed the few Italian defenders. Demolition charges were removed, and in the hour or so before first light the Commandos raised considerable hell by shooting up everything in sight.

Their upper hand was short-lived, as the Commandos who were to have been relieved about dawn suddenly became the object of a violent German reaction to their unwelcome presence. They were attacked repeatedly and casualties began rising to alarming numbers, thanks to a nearby Tiger tank and intense mortar fire. The dilemma of the British Commandos worsened as the day wore on with still no sign of the 50th Division.

No. 3 Commando held out until the afternoon of July 14, at which point the survivors split into small groups and fought

TOP: Grim-faced chutists have no illusions of easy victory. At Sicily, the parachute attack at Primosole Bridge turned out to be the fourth costliest of many such fiascos of the four-day-old campaign. MIDDLE: British and Canadian assault troops head inland after landing near Pachino. ABOVE: Once more into the breech—British artillerymen keep the barrel hot. After the battles between German and British airborne, more artillery and armor were used.

German paratroops hit the silk. At Primosole, the Green Devils, who had been dropped to bolster weak Italian defenses, went head-to-head with the British airborne Red Devils in the war's only action between opposing airborne forces.

their way to friendly lines while the Germans recaptured the bridge and eliminated a grave threat to their withdrawal.

About 5 p.m., the lead unit of the 50th Division finally arrived and reclaimed the Malati Bridge from the hastily retreating Germans, who had not had time to reset the demolitions. That evening Dempsey said, "The men of No. 3 Commando are the finest body of soldiers I have seen anywhere!" However, their valor was not without high cost: 28 killed, 66 wounded and 59 missing.

The parachute operation at Primosole Bridge turned out to be the most costly airborne-glider fiasco of the four-day-old Sicilian campaign. Like its predecessors, little went according to plan. Code-named FUSTIAN, the operation began early in the evening of July 13 when 145 aircraft (126 troop carriers and 19 towing the Horsa gliders of the parachute artillery) lifted off from North Africa. Important lessons had been learned from the earlier British glider landings at Syracuse and the two U.S. 82nd Airborne Division parachute operations at Gela. The flight plan was deliberately kept five miles off the eastern coast of Sicily, well away from any temptation on the part of the Allied ships to open fire. The planes were not to turn toward land until parallel with the mouth of the Simeto, where they were to quickly head for the DZ and drop the airborne from a height of 500 meters.

As before, though, the aerial convoy was fired on by friendly naval vessels, some of them as far away as Malta, others directly offshore. Heavy flak from Axis batteries added to a scene that one paratrooper described as straight from Dante's *Inferno.* The flak caused chaos—planes dispersed in all directions. Twenty-six returned to North Africa without dropping their troops, 14 were lost (11 from flak). Others managed to drop their sticks before crashing, some into the sea. In all, only 30 aircraft managed to drop their troops onto the correct DZ; 9 more were close, but 48 others were off by up to 20 miles. Only four gliders made it to their LZ, while seven more managed to land in various places on the plain of Catania. Of the 1,856 officers and men who departed North Africa, only 12 officers and 283 men were landed at or near Primosole Bridge.

Several planes exploded in mid-air, and the four gliders that did manage to land near the bridge did so violently. One broke in half and its two pilots were thrown through the perspex windows of the cockpit and lay bleeding and mangled on the grass. A lieutenant viewing this scene thanked God he had gone to war by parachute.

The headquarters section and a portion of "A" Company of Frost's 2nd Para were dropped with great precision on their assigned DZ southwest of the bridge. Frost landed in a shallow ditch and wrenched his knee. Flak and artillery fire filled the northern plain with a Fourth of July atmosphere, and the DZ was burning in many places where incendiary bullets had set it alight. By 1 a.m., Frost had managed to assemble 112 men and begun moving toward the three "Johnny" objectives. A short time later, hobbling painfully with the aid of a stick, Frost encountered Brigadier Lathbury, who was celebrating his 37th birthday in a very disagreeable fashion.

Lathbury had landed in the wrong place and, like Frost, had no idea of the situation at Primosole Bridge. All he knew was that Frost now had a force of about 140 men and had occupied positions on the Johnny I hill without either supporting weapons or communications.

About 5 a.m., the airborne commander and 40 or 50 men arrived near the south end of the bridge, and as they were preparing to attack with nothing more powerful than Sten guns they encountered a trooper who brought the first good news of the operation.

Three hours earlier a band of 50 Red Devils from Pearson's 1st Battalion had seized the bridge intact from terrified Italian defenders who fled in panic when one of the gliders crash-landed by the bridge. A Royal Engineer sapper team hastily dismantled the demolitions strapped to the gliders and threw them into the muddy Simeto. Near dawn, Pearson arrived

and took charge of establishing a defense for their prize with a pathetically small force numbering 120 men from his battalion, two platoons of the 3rd Battalion and three antitank guns. Matters improved considerably when Major David Hunter, the enterprising Brigade Major, arrived with an assortment of captured Italian and German weapons he had collected while using a captured vehicle.

The enemy defenses on the north bank of the Simeto consisted mainly of several ineffective Italian battalions, while to the south the German paratroop battalion had made its presence felt. The battalion consisted of veteran troops, and during the first hours of the battle their fire caused many of the British losses. The German gunners unwittingly had registered their guns on the exact line of approach of most of the Allied aircraft. One platoon accounted for three gliders, while another shot down three Dakotas. On the ground they were rapidly collecting prisoners and by midnight had captured 82 Red Devils.

At dawn the Germans began a deadly machine-gun and mortar attack against the 2nd Battalion, which bore the brunt of the first counterattacks on July 14. There was heavy fighting around Johnny II. The hill soon fell to the attackers. To their astonishment, the British found their main opposition to be German paratroops attacking from the west. From Johnny II the Germans delivered withering machine-gun fire, and a patrol sent to deal with the problem was driven off with further losses. Throughout the morning Frost's casualties grew as German accuracy improved. Dry grass to the south caught fire and the heat from the flames forced the surrounded British paratroopers into a dangerously constricted perimeter around Johnny I. With ammunition running low, it was clear the 2nd Battalion could not resist an all-out counterattack.

Fortunately, a Royal Artillery gunnery officer was attached to the battalion to act as a Naval Forward Observation Officer for the 6-inch guns of the cruiser HMS *Newfoundland* laying offshore. About 9 a.m., he succeeded in establishing radio contact and, as Frost recorded, "almost immediately the high velocity medicine began to arrive with a suddenness and efficiency that completely turned the scales." Although the notoriously inefficient British radios soon went dead for good, the Germans elected not to press their advantage.

Throughout the ordeal of 2nd Para the defenders of the bridge were left relatively unmolested until mid-morning, when a squadron of Focke-Wulfe 190s attacked but caused few casualties. At noon several German 88s heavily shelled the British for an hour.

Earlier, about 10:30, a German dispatch rider carrying messages to Colonel Heilmann was fired on north of the bridge. He returned to Catania, where he reported the presence of British troops to Captain Franz Stangenberg, who immediately drove to the same place, only to be rudely greeted himself by automatic-weapons fire from Pearson's force. Undaunted, Stangenberg collected about 20 men and attempted a counterattack. This time the British reaction was far more violent, and the Germans were obliged to hastily withdraw.

Stangenberg's worst fears were now confirmed and with no further reinforcements due until that night, he knew he would have to deal personally with the unhealthy situation at Primosole Bridge if calamity were be averted. Returning to Catania, he telephoned Heidrich and received permission to employ the only uncommitted German unit, Captain Erich Fassl's signal company, which had been airlifted in the previous afternoon.

The NCOs began rounding up every German soldier they could find, most of them headquarters personnel: clerks, cooks, mechanics and drivers, in all "a rather motley crew" of about 200 men. Stangenberg's *ad hoc* task force numbered about 200 and combined with Fassl's signalers, for a total of

TOP: Shrugging its cargo of men and supplies, this German transport plane must again run a gauntlet of Allied planes. Aircraft carrying elements of Col. Ludwig Heilmann's 3rd Parachute Regiment were attacked over the Straits of Messina by 20 P-38s. MIDDLE: Early arrivals get ready for further drops. German airborne reinforcements at Primosole Bridge were a complete surprise to British paratroops. ABOVE: A German paratrooper advances toward heavy cover.

TOP: This captured gun position—like Primosole Bridge—was one of many small objectives that eventually mounted into Allied victory in Sicily. After the agony at the bridge, British Lieut. Col. Pearson quipped that his "bloody tactics were bloody well successful." MIDDLE: An American halftrack squeezes down a narrow street in a Sicilian village. ABOVE: Italian POWs line up in Enna's town square in front of a closed Banca D'Italia.

nearly 350. In addition, Stangenberg arranged for the support of a nearby German heavy flak battery to provide badly needed artillery support.

The first German counterattack, at 2 p.m., was repulsed without much difficulty, but it was immediately followed by another that forced Pearson to order his perimeter shortened. In addition to the fire of the heavy flak battery (two 88s), the Germans also had managed to bring forward a self-propelled 88 and several antitank guns, and for two hours their shelling made life for the defenders of Primosole Bridge exceedingly disagreeable. While the Red Devils were in no imminent danger of being overrun, ammunition was running low and casualties rising. Miraculously, a surgical team set up near the south end of the bridge managed to perform 72 operations relatively unmolested.

As the afternoon waned the most serious threat emerged from Fassl's force, which attacked the airborne's right flank from the east, taking the first British prisoners at the bridge. When they discovered they were fighting airborne "colleagues," one German officer noted, there was considerable mutual respect. They were, he said, "splendid fellows. . . really a pity that one had to fight against such spirited types so similar to our German paratroopers, and who did not seem to be annoyed that they had been captured by their German 'brothers-in-arms.' "

As the two paratroop forces bloodied one another along the Simeto and around the Johnny positions to the south, there was no thought of the strategies preached in their respective war colleges. The battle was fought at the most elemental level as a struggle for survival. Fortunately for the British, the Germans had not had time to develop a plan for the defense of the plain of Catania. Instead, chance dictated the actions of both sides.

Before all radio contact was lost, Lathbury was made aware of the problems confronting the relief force. When the Germans succeeded in moving an 88 up to the north bank and methodically began to destroy the two pill boxes at the southern end of the bridge at point-blank range, Lathbury knew the situation had become hopeless. As one by one his guns were running out of ammunition, he ordered a withdrawal to the hills comprising the Johnny positions, where, it was hoped, the survivors could make contact with the 2nd Battalion. For some hours there had been only ominous silence from Frost's force and Lathbury was not certain if Frost and his men had even survived. If contact could not be made, the Red Devils were to use escape and evasion tactics in all effort to avoid capture.

At 6:30 p.m., the order was given and after 16 hours in British hands, Primosole Bridge was back under enemy control.

Pearson's troopers failed to establish contact with the remnants of the 2nd Battalion, but about 15 men from Yeldham's 3rd Battalion managed to slip through and join Frost. Shortly before dark the first Sherman tank of the 4th Armored Brigade appeared in an olive grove south of Johnny I, followed two hours later by a company of weary infantrymen of the 6th Battalion, the Durham Light Infantry (Regiment), who had marched more than 20 miles in the sizzling heat.

For the gallant paratroopers of the lst Parachute Brigade, the Primosole Bridge operation was a bitter pill. A mere 16 percent of the total number who left North Africa the previous night ever saw action. More than one-third were never even dropped. The foothills of Etna and the plain crawled with those who were dropped too far away to be of use. Two of those dropped along the slopes of Mt. Etna survived for 24-days on a diet of apples, enlivening their ordeal by raiding enemy installations and ambushing three dispatch riders.

An unknown number were missing, and casualties among the participants at the bridge totalled 115, including 27 killed. With typical British understatement, Brigadier Lathbury

called the operation "disappointing." Not only were the Brits unable to hold Primosole Bridge, but Operation FUSTIAN boded ill for the once-promising future of airborne operations. Montgomery immediately suspended all further airborne operations pending better coordination and training of the supporting airmen. The American commander of the Sicily operation, Dwight D. Eisenhower, convened a board of officers to review the Sicily airborne-glider operations and present him recommendations for the future employment of airborne forces, a future in limbo until cooler heads prevailed.

The first phase of the battle for Primosole Bridge had borne an uncanny parallel to its more famous successor, Operation MARKET-GARDEN, the ill-fated Allied airborne operation in mid- September 1944 to seize a bridgehead over the Rhine at Arnhem, Holland. Lieutenant Colonel Frost and his 2nd Para are best known for their heroic stand at Arnhem Bridge against the full fury of the 10th SS Panzer Division while waiting in vain for relief by the British XXX Corps.

In Sicily the failure of the air force to successfully drop the airborne force, combined with the inability of the ground column to speedily relieve and reinforce the airborne, cost the British an unprecedented opportunity to seize control of the plain of Catania and end the Sicily campaign quickly.

Frost was embittered and later wrote that Montgomery ought to have employed the three parachute brigades of the 1st Airborne Division, that had he done so, the Sicily campaign would have ended in about ten days.

The airborne battle for Primosole Bridge was merely the first chapter for one of the most bitterly contested objectives of the war. Following the airborne came the armor and infantry of the ground force. For the next week the British spent themselves attempting to force a breakthrough to Catania. Although Primosole Bridge soon returned to British control, the German airborne fought a magnificent delaying action in the orchards north of the Simeto.

The fighting for the bridge bought the Germans enough time to deny Montgomery a strategic victory and to induce a change of British strategy that sentenced the campaign to a unhappy duration of 38 days.

Their job done meanwhile, the Red Devils turned the battle for Primosole Bridge over to others. Then, as Lieutenant Colonel Pearson led his tired and dirty troops from the battlefield, he was stopped by a staff captain who emerged from a large staff car immaculately dressed with a Sam Browne belt and gleaming boots. The officer imperiously confronted Pearson, who was not wearing his badges of rank and whose uniform consisted of an old army pullover and muddy boots.

"Who are you, my man?" the officer asked. Pearson, a Glaswegian and one of the most highly decorated officers in the British Army, replied in a deliberately pronounced accent, "A'm the commander o' the Furrst Parachute Battalion."

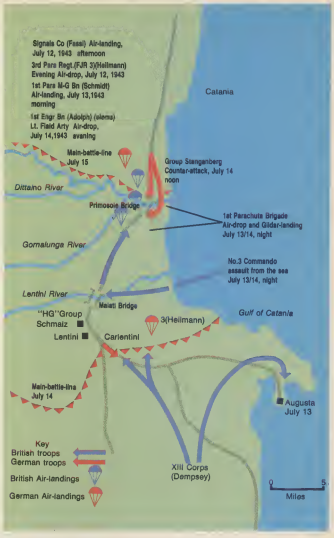
The flustered captain saluted and said: "Jolly fine show, Sir. What tactics did you use?"

To the great amusement of his men, Pearson leisurely looked the officer up and down and then replied, "I don't know what bloody tactics I used, but they were bloody well successful."

For the Green Devils of the German airborne their ordeal was to continue despite additional reinforcements and the arrival of *Kampfgruppe Schmalz* from Lentini. They were attacked without respite but refused to concede Catania or its airfield.

Although the operation wro·e a little-known but undeniably illustrious chapter in the history of the 1st Airborne Division, the battle for Primosole Bridge became the first of the Allies' "bridges too far." □

Carlo W. D'Este is a retired U.S. Army lieutenant colonel who has previously written about the Normandy campaign (Decision in Normandy, *E.P. Dutton, 1983). The full story of the battle for Primosole Bridge is in his latest book,* Bitter Victory.



TOP: The campaign was prolonged, critics say, because of failed drops and the inability of the ground force to speedily relieve the airborne troops. ABOVE: A British Bren carrier moves up to Catania, where the reinforced German Green Devils, their ordeal far from over, were attacked without respite as they defended the town and airfield.

Tokyo Express Interrupted

The confused Battle of Cape Esperance in October 1942 set the pattern for a series of bloody night encounters before the U.S. Navy finally stopped the "Tokyo Express."

By Jon Guttman

It was nearly midnight, October 11, 1942, as Cruiser Division 6 of the Imperial Japanese Navy steamed confidently toward Cape Esperance, Solomon Islands. Despite their having been spotted by an enemy bomber at 8:10 p.m., there had been no further incident, and now, as the warships neared their objective, their crews felt safe within the protective mantle of darkness. Less than 20 miles away, the island of Savo bore mute witness to the fact that for the cruisers and destroyers of the Japanese Navy, the night was their element. Two months previously, the area had seen the three cruisers of this force—*Aoba, Furutaka* and *Kinugasa*—contribute to the destruction of one Australian and three American heavy cruisers. The victory at Savo, achieved only two days after the landing of U.S. Marines on Guadalcanal, had temporarily driven the U. S. Navy from the area and bought the Japanese time to shift main elements of their own fleet south to Rabaul for what would now be an all-out confrontation for control of the Solomon Islands, and the western Pacific Ocean.

A subsequent air-sea battle in the Eastern Solomons had failed to sink any American aircraft carriers while costing the Japanese one of their own, the light carrier *Ryujo.* More importantly, it failed to neutralize U. S. air power, which was establishing an ascendancy over that of Japan. Thus, despite continuing air attacks from Japanese bases in the Solomons, the American carrier pilots and Marine airmen based on Guadalcanal's newly-completed Henderson Field retained sufficient air superiority to dominate the surrounding seas by day. But, as the Battle of Savo and several successful transport runs had demonstrated, Japan still ruled the night.

While daytime troop convoys from Shortland Island had been driven back on October 9 by air activity from Henderson Field the light cruiser *Tatsuta* and five destroyers on the night of 9 October had successfully made the run—which the beleaguered Americans soon dubbed the "Tokyo Express" for its regularity—to land General Haruyoshi Hyakutake and

Out of the darkness, multiple flashes of shellfire...a stricken Japanese ship staggers with the impact as Admiral Goto's supposed milk run turns into a wild melee marking the begining of the end of devastating Japanese nighttime actions and supply runs dubbed the Tokyo Express.

A sailor's nightmare—fire at sea—is captured in this painting by Dennis Adams. Closer-up, such a scene defies description, as the crew of the Duncan *learned at Esperance. After the men abandoned ship in the wake of fire and exploding ammunition, the survivors fended off sharks until the* McCalla *arrived to drive away the blood-frenzied fish with small-arms fire.*

reinforcements at Tassafaronga. And now, on the night of October 11, the three cruisers of Cruiser Division 6, escorted by the destroyers *Fubuki* and *Murakumo*, were to shell the Marine airfield and other installations on Guadalcanal. At the same time, a reinforcement group consisting of two seaplane carriers (*Chitose* and *Nisshin*) pressed into service as transports and escorted by six destroyers, would deliver more troops and heavy artillery near Cape Esperance, concluding a series of eight runs since October to land the 10,000-man Second Army Division on Guadalcanal.

Aboard his flagship *Aoba*, Rear Admiral Aritomo Goto looked forward to a successful mission. Soon he would demolish Henderson Field and, with the Marine bombers thus neutralized, steam home in relative safetly in the morning.

Suddenly, a flash of light pierced the darkness. The Japanese were puzzled; what was this? A signal from the transports? *Aoba's* skipper ordered his men to turn on a searchlight. Suddenly, at 11:46, multiple flashes erupted from a single point in Savo Sound, followed by the rumble of gunfire. This was in turn followed by a salvo of accurately fired shells which struck the Japanese flagship.

As Goto pondered whether or not this volley had been fired in error from the reinforcement group, a second ship began firing at his formation, then a third. *Furutaka*, steaming behind *Aoba*, returned the fire and struck one of the unidentified vessels. Then the firing ceased, leaving the Japanese still uncertain over what had gone wrong.

Goto's dilemma was resolved once and for all as the strangers abruptly resumed fire. Both *Aoba* and *Furutaka* were repeatedly struck, the flagship taking no less than 40 hits. Among the victims of this devastatingly accurate fire was Rear Admiral Goto. As he was carried from *Aoba's* shattered bridge to his cabin, the mortally wounded admiral repeatedly murmured what would be his last words; "Bakayaro! Bakayaro!" [Stupid bastard!]. It will never be known whether he was referring to what he still thought were Japanese ships firing at him or at himself. What is certain is the fact that he was not the victim of misguided shelling from nervous guncrews, but of the radar-directed gunfire of American cruisers and destroyers. Moreover, Goto's force had steamed head-on into a classic trap—the Americans had "crossed their T" and were thus in position to hit them with full broadsides.

By the end of September 1942, it may be noted, both the U.S. and Imperial Japanese forces on Guadalcanal had recovered from their losses of the past month and were preparing for yet another showdown. With 26,000 Japanese soldiers and a 3,500-man naval contingent facing the Marines at Lunga Point and Imperial warships gathering at Bougainville, Vice Admiral Robert L. Ghormley, commanding U. S. naval forces in the Southwest Pacific, took steps of his own to reinforce and defend the American foothold on the island. At Noumea, 6,000 U. S. troops of the American Division prepared to embark for Guadalcanal aboard two large transports with an eight-destroyer escort under the overall command of Admiral Richard Kelly Turner, while the aircraft carrier *Hornet* took up a covering position to the west of the contested island. A task force headed by the newly arrived battleship *Washington* also took station east of Malaita. The very presence of these major warships in the waters off Guadalcanal were a much-needed encouragement to the Marines, but they also underlined the tenuous state of American seapower in the area even at this point in the campaign. *Washington* had moved in to replace her sister, *North Carolina*, which had been badly damaged by the Japanese submarine *I-15*; on the same day, September 15, the I-15 caused mortal damage to the destroyer *O'Brien*, while the *I-19* sank the carrier *Wasp*, leaving the *Hornet* the only U. S. carrier fully operational in the South Pacific.

To afford the American convoy still further protection, Admiral Ghormley dispatched a newly-organized cruiser force to the waters south of Guadalcanal. "Task Force Sugar" [Task Force 64], under the command of Rear Admiral Norman Scott, comprised the heavy cruisers *San Francisco* (flagship) and *Salt Lake City*, the light cruisers *Boise* and *Helena*, and the destroyers *Farenholt*, *Buchanan*, *Duncan*, *Laffey* and *McCalla*. Scott was one flag officer who had taken to heart the lessons of the recent Savo debacle. He had spent the past three

Vessels of any size could join the Tokyo Express as the Japanese shifted their forces in this island-hopping war. Here, Japanese troops board barges that will carry them through the "Slot" from Shortland Island in the Solomons to Guadalcanal. The narrow channel's strategic value to the Japanese was threatened by U.S. Task Force Sugar, which posted itself off Cape Esperance.

weeks giving his command intensive training in night fighting, a decision which was soon to pay rich rewards.

Task Force Sugar left Espiritu Santo on 7 October and set course for Rennel Island. Once there, it cruised off the southwest coast of Guadalcanal for two days. Then, on the afternoon of October 11, Scott received a report from scouting aircraft of a Japanese "Express" 210 miles away and coming down the "Slot"—the narrow channel between the two parallel chains of islands that make up the Solomons—towards Guadalcanal. Scott led his ships around the western end of the island to intercept, taking position off Cape Esperance in order to cover the entrance to Savo Sound.

The Americans at Henderson Field already suspected that something big might be in the offing. The Japanese 11th Air Fleet at Rabaul had dispatched a force of 35 Mitsubishi G4M bombers and 30 Mitsubishi A6M2 Zero fighter escorts to neutralize the airfield, only to find the Marines, in their Grumman F4F Wildcats, waiting. The attack failed, with the Japanese, losing eight bombers and four Zeros. Then, at 8:10 p.m., a B-17 bomber reported the enemy warships. Admiral Goto sailed on in blissful ignorance that an alerted and aroused enemy awaited him.

At 11:25, the *Helena* made contact with the approaching enemy but did not report it for 15 minutes—she was equipped with new SG radar gear, and her captain apparently wanted to confirm the contact. At 11:30, however a floatplane from the *San Francisco* did the necessary confirming when it also sighted the Japanese.

Task Force Sugar was off the southwest coast of Savo Island and north of Cape Esperance at this time, heading northeastward in column, with the *Farenholt*, *Duncan* and *Laffey* leading the *San Francisco*, *Boise*, *Salt Lake City*, *Helena*, *Buchanan* and *McCalla*. To block the passage between Savo and Cape Esperance, Scott ordered a reversal in column at 11:33: "Left to course 230 degrees!" Led by the *San Francisco*, the main force executed the maneuver smartly, but the three destroyers in the forward van, *Farenholt*, *Duncan* and *Laffey*, which meant to swing out as a separate column to regain head position, did so belatedly, and they were thus left behind the main column.

Aboard *Farenholt*, Destroyer Squadron 12 commander Captain R. G. Tobin ordered his three destroyers to raise speed for a dash down the starboard flank of the southbound column and informed Admiral Scott of his intention to regain van position.

Meanwhile, a scout plane preparing to take off from the *Salt Lake City* caught fire on its catapult. This was the first flicker of light that the oncoming Japanese saw, and it should have given the Americans away, but Admiral Goto was confused—uncertain as to whether it might have been a signal from one of his reinforcement group ships, which were, in fact, safely within Savo Sound and unloading their materiel ashore by that time.

At this point, the Japanese were only 5,000 yards from the Americans and closing. Yet Scott was still as much in the dark as was Goto as to the presence and strength of his opponent, and it took yet another freak accident to break the silence. The *Helena*, having confirmed her radar contact, signalled Scott, requesting permission to open fire. Scott replied "Roger!" to indicate that he had received the message, although he still wished to hold fire until Tobin's three destroyers had regained their proper place in formation. The *Helena's* captain, misinterpreting this signal as permission to fire, cut loose at 11:46. His shells struck the oncoming *Aoba* at 4,800-yard range. The other cruiser captains had standing orders to fire at their own discretion, and when the Japanese answered the *Helena's* salvo, they joined in, and the battle was on. This proved to be bad news for Goto and his men, but it was equally grievous for Tobin's three destroyers.

As the Duncan made her turn to regain the van, her radar had detected the Japanese and her skipper, Lieut. Cmdr. E.B. Taylor, assuming that Tobin had also made contact and was turning, sheared off on a more westerly course. Thus, when shooting commenced, Tobin's disrupted column was spread out between the American and Japanese cruisers.

When the first shells hit the *Aoba*, Admiral Goto ordered

a column right with the intention of reversing if necessary in the face of an enemy attack, but the maneuver only served to expose each of his ships in turn to the salvos of the American cruisers. Equally exposed was the *Duncan*, which found herself less than a mile from the *Furutaka* and dodging shells from both sides. The *Furutaka* had come under fire from the *Salt Lake City*, but despite her lack of radar, the Japanese cruiser's reply was remarkably accurate, striking home on her antagonist. The *Duncan* also fired on the *Furutaka*, shifted fire to the oncoming destroyer *Murakumo*, and then launched two torpedoes at the *Furutaka*, but the latter dodged them and turned her 8-inch guns on the troublesome destroyer.

The result, at such close range, was devastating. In rapid succession, the *Duncan's* boiler room was hit, her gun director was disabled, her forward stack toppled, and powder in her No.2 handling room was ignited. A moment later, an American salvo struck *Duncan* and with all lights blown out, she staggered out of the fight, mortally damaged.

Also apparently the target of misdirected American shells was the *Farenholt*. One struck the fireroom and opened a leak in the main steam line of her No.1 boiler, releasing a jet capable of boiling her crew alive. The *Farenholt's* captain, Lieut. Cmdr. E.T. Seaward, urged the fireroom watch to hold out as long as possible before it secured and abandoned."We'll steam her into Tokyo!" replied the water tender in charge.

Destroyer *Laffey* was more fortunate, emerging from the avalanche of shells falling around her from both sides without serious damage, although one of her 5-inch gun turrets was malfunctioning. With the remaining three turrets, she contributed her fair share to the carnage aboard the *Aoba*, then turned to attack the destroyer *Fubuki*—betrayed by blinking lights—and then engaged the destroyer *Hatsuyuki*.

Farther down the Japanese line, the *Kinugasa* either failed to receive or failed to heed Admiral Goto's order to swing starboard. Instead, she turned to port, thereby saving herself and the destroyer *Hatsuyuki*, which followed her—hurried along by a three-gun salvo from *Laffey*. On the other hand, the *Fubuki's* captain concluded, as had Admiral Goto, that the fire may have come from fellow Japanese and switched on his identification lights. This only attracted a more deliberate salvo from all four of the American cruisers and from the *Laffey*, a hailstorm which quickly sank the luckless destroyer.

All of this had occurred in the first minute, and then Admiral Scott ordered a cease fire. Like Goto, he feared—correctly—that he might be firing on his own ships. Not all of his cruiser captains heard the order, and as the *Aoba* made a turn, another American salvo wrecked her bridge, mortally wounding the Japanese admiral, and left the ship unable to fire her guns.

Thus far, the Americans had been in position for a perfect victory, but the confusion caused by the presence of the three errant destroyers in the line of fire had robbed them of the opportunity. The Japanese, however, were in equal confusion and in even worse deployment. Victory would go to whoever gained complete grasp of the situation and regained control of his forces first and here, too, the Americans held the advantage, since they still had a force commander. Scott communicated with Captain Tobin, attempting to locate the three wayward destroyers. Tobin told him they were coming up to starboard, and Scott ordered them to flash recognition signals. Once they had done so, he ordered his cruisers to resume fire at 11:51.

Meanwhile, the Japanese sailors were recovering with remarkable skill, contradicting a popular American propaganda myth of the time that they were incapable of taking independent initiative. Although the *Aoba* was still on fire, her crew managed to get the damage under control and even restore some of their guns to operational use. Astern to the northeast, *Kinugasa* had reversed course and regained contact with her stricken comrades. Soon all of the Japanese ships were steaming northwest in two columns, parallel to the course of the pursuing Americans.

The light cruiser *Boise*, finding herself closing on the *Furutaka*, re-opened the engagement with a salvo at the burning Japanese vessel. The *Furutaka* was also the target of torpedoes, one of which struck home. With one engine stopped and fire spreading out of control, the ship was now doomed. HIJMS *Furutaka* was settling when, at 12:40, she suddenly capsized 22 miles northwest of Savo, there joining the sunken hulks of HMAS *Canberra*,USS *Astoria*, USS *Quincy* and USS *Vincennes*, the Allied ships she had helped sink two months before in the nighttime Battle of Savo Island.

Captain Mike Moran of the *Boise* at this point picked up a fresh radar "pip" and turned on a searchlight to identify the new target. It turned out to be the *Kinugasa*, which now became the focus of American fire. The *Boise*, in turn, found herself the primary target of the Japanese. Deadly Type 93 torpedoes churned towards *Boise*, but Moran managed to comb their wakes. He was less successful in dodging shells, as four from the *Aoba* punctured the *Boise's* hull, stopping one engine and folding the magazine, while two from the

AFTERMATH OF A SEA BATTLE

Often more horrific than the sea battles of the Solomons was the grim struggle for survival that faced a sailor after his ship was sunk. If he made it onto a life boat or life raft, there were probably enough supplies aboard to stave off thirst and starvation for a time, but he faced the hazards of exposure to sun and the elements until he was found.

That was easier said than done in the vastness of the Pacific, and it is a credit to the untiring, unsung efforts of the ships and patrol aircraft of both sides that so many adrift sailors were rescued.

If forced into the water without a boat, the seaman faced much worse odds. Although the waters of the South Pacific were far warmer than the freezing North Atlantic, they were still below human body temperature, and eventually this would sap the strength of the swimmer. That was a distant worry, however, in relation to the more immediate deprivations: food, water, shelter, navigational equipment and all but the broadest sense of direction.

With or without boat or life raft, the Solomon Islands survivor also had to contend with the terrible possibility of encountering the one guaranteed winner: the shark.

There was no predicting what lay in store when a triangular fin was seen knifing through the waves nearby. The fish could be satiated or in the mood for smaller, easier game and might just pass by or take a casual swipe at a swimmer's leg. If it was hungry enough to make a determined attack or if it was in a feeding frenzy, the victim could only look forward to the repeated onslaughts of a remorseless foe.

The crew of the U.S. destroyer *Meredith*, for example, experienced several of the cruellest depredations ever suffered by any single party of castaways who lived to tell of them. On October 15, 1942, she and the tug *Vireo* were caught by Japanese aircraft as they attempted a transport run to Guadalcanal. Since the *Vireo* was only capable of 14 knots, Commander Harry E. Hubbard of the *Meredith* opted to evacuate her crew and sink her. As *Meredith* was about to launch a torpedo, however, 27 aircraft from the Japanese carrier *Zuikaku* appeared and attacked, leaving the destroyer shattered and sinking in minutes. The survivors crawled aboard hastily-jettisoned life rafts, only to die painfully, one by

Kinugasa pierced his No. 1 Turret and hit the forward magazine. The latter might well have destroyed the entire ship had it not been flooded. The *Kinugasa* now came under fire from the *Salt Lake City*, and the two cruisers squared off for a one-on-one duel, leaving *Boise's* crew to deal with fires and damage.

At 12:20, Admiral Scott directed his ships south-southwest, breaking off the engagement. He was satisfied with results so far and saw nothing more to be gained by continuing what had degenerated into an untidy chase. He gathered his ships together and sent Lieut. Cmdr. Cooper's destroyer *McCalla* to locate and assist the cripples.

When *Salt Lake City* and the *Kinugasa* disengaged to go their separate ways, both had scored hits on one another, but neither was mortally damaged. The *Boise's* crewmen fought their battle damage with such a determination that the fires were quenched and the ship was retiring at 20 knots by 12:40. "Noisy Boise" would make it back to Philadelphia for repairs, but she had taken heavy casualties: 107 men dead and 35 more wounded.

Farther behind the route of the battle, the *Farenholt's* crew had managed to effect damage control and the ship eventually made her way to Espiritu Santo under her own power, escorted by the late-arriving destroyer *Aaron Ward*. But the *Duncan* was still circling at 15 knots, a flaming death ship. Cut off from the crew aft of the bridge by the inferno raging behind him and unable to communicate with them, her Lieut. Cmdr. Taylor ordered the bridge abandoned. He, the forward crew and their wounded evacuated on rafts, unaware that there were still men alive aft. With some communication restored there, Lieutenant H. R. Kabat assumed command as senior officer on board and ordered the ship beached in hopes of eventually saving and repairing her. Accordingly an engineer officer and chief torpedoman tried to make for Savo Island, but fire spreading from the bow forced them to halt their gallant effort, and the engineers abandoned the forward engine room. Gradually the *Duncan* lost power and slowed to a stop. At 2 a. m., the ammunition began to explode and the last of the vessel's survivors abandoned ship.

A new melee now developed as a school of sharks, attracted by the scent of blood, circled around the huddle of floating objects and swimmers. The men fended them off as best they could, but the sharks bored in relentlessly. Suddenly, rifle-fire broke up the shark attack. It came from the *McCalla*, which hunting for the *Boise* west of Savo, had sighted the *Duncan's* fiery remains and arrived just in time to save 195 of her crew. Dying aboard the destroyer were 48 to 50 men.

To the northwest, the *Aoba's* crew mastered the fire on their ship and then joined the *Kinugasa* in retiring at full speed, to put as much distance between themselves and Henderson Field as possible by dawn. The destroyers *Murakumo* and *Natsugumo* remained behind to pick up survivors from the *Furutaka* and *Fubuki*. The Japanese thought they had sunk two enemy cruisers.

That appraisal, however, had been born of confusion and wishful thinking and no less so than Admiral Scott's estimate of Japanese losses, which he put at four cruisers and four destroyers. These results were released to the public, representing Cape Esperance as a decisive victory that avenged the earlier loss of four cruisers (at the embarrassing defeat at Savo on August 9, which Fleet Admiral Ernest J. King found it opportune to reveal only now, and in passing). Scott suddenly became the hero of the South Pacific. He had indeed won a victory, but its circumstances and the true results warranted no complacency.

Dawn of October 12 found the *McCalla* on the scene, searching for any survivors of the *Duncan* that could have been missed the night before. Nearby, the *Murakumo and Natsugumo* came upon 400 survivors of the *Furutaka* and picked them up. As they tried to withdraw, however, their luck ran out—Marine bombers from Henderson Field caught them. The *Murakumo* was the first hit, with many killed and wounded. Too badly damaged to continue, she was abandoned and scuttled. An overcrowded *Natsugumo* resumed the flight, but later sank from yet another air attack.

At 7 a.m., long-range U.S. Army Air Force B-17s located the rest of the retreating Japanese cruiser force and made a haphazard attack that scored no hits before being beaten off by antiaircraft fire.

At 2:30 p.m., the *McCalla* came upon the survivors of the *Fubuki* and threw lifebelts and lifelines to them, but, preferring death to captivity, the Japanese sailors refused the offer. The *McCalla* moved on, and those Japanese who could resumed the long swim to Guadalcanal. It is not known how many—if any—made it. Despite the losses of the *Murakumo* and *Natsugumo*, the Japanese reinforcement group accomplished the primary Japanese mission of landing its troops and artillery. But so did the American convoy that Scott had been covering. The reinforced 164th Regiment of the American Division landed on October 13, providing much-needed relief to the weary Marines.

Even so, the Americans' relief was short-lived. Encouraging though it had been, the Battle of Cape Esperence had

one, of horrendous wounds, burns and injuries for which there was neither medicine, dressing nor anaesthetic. Among them was Hubbard.

There were not enough rafts available, and the strongest men clung to the lifelines until the death of another wounded man provided room for one more aboard. Then sharks, trailing the drifting convoy of rafts, took turns slashing at the swimmers on the lifelines. The sailors, both in and out of the water, kicked and stabbed at the marauders to keep them away, but as blood mingled with the water the sharks became more aggressive. One even leaped aboard a listing raft to get at a bleeding man, taking an ugly bite out of his thigh while the sailor's comrades flailed and thrashed at it with their oars and finally drove the predator back overboard.

The ordeal lasted three days and nights before 73 exhausted survivors were picked up by the destroyers *Grayson* and *Gwin* and the tug *Seminole*.

Despite the hardships of survival in the water, rescue was not always a viable option—if the rescuer was the enemy. Generally, the Americans and Japanese seldom picked up men from the other side unless they felt them of possible use for interrogation. Any American fished out by the Japanese could often look forward to neglect or torture. The Japanese expected the same treatment from their adversaries, and when offered succor by a passing American destroyer they would usually decline it, preferring to take their chances in the water. If the Americans tried to force them aboard, they would often dive as deep as their strength and consciousness would take them, in order to drown themselves in preference to the dishonor of capture.

Given all these factors, it was always preferable to evacuate the crew of a doomed ship before they had to endure the lifeboats. This was not always possible, of course, but it was remarkable how often the Japanese, often at great risk amidst continued attack, managed to effect such ship-to-ship rescues. Even so, the relentless fighting in and around Ironbottom Bay could often mean a crew might be saved, only to have the rescuing ship herself sunk in another enemy air attack.

During and immediately after the Battle of Cape Esperance, for example, the heavy cruiser *Furutaka's* men had two rescuing destroyers sunk from under them in quick succession.

TOP: Eyes on the sea, a Navy lookout grabs a bite of chow. In the Solomons, American forces relentlessly kept the pressure on to break the schedule of the Tokyo Express. MIDDLE: Those efforts paid off in enemy tonnage, as shown by Boise *crewman W.R. Martin, pointing with pride to the Japanese kills claimed by his ship at Cape Esperance. ABOVE: But victory was not cheap. Here, the battered* Boise *arrives at Philadelphia for repairs.*

not been decisive enough to weaken the Japanese. It had been just stinging enough to provoke several days of mutual reprisals. The commander of the Japanese Navy, Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto, departed for the first time from his policy of hoarding his battleships, dispatching the *Kongo* and *Haruna* under Vice Admiral Takeo Kurita for a fresh attempt to neutralize Henderson Field. Planes from a newly completed airfield on the southern tip of Bougainville Island covered them by day, and they arrived one mile off the coast of Guadalcanal at 11 p.m., on October 13. Slowing to a leisurely 18 knots, the 27,500-ton behemoths loosed a 90-minute barrage of 14-inch incendiary shells from their 16 guns. Their presence was opposed only by the American motor torpedo boats PT-38, PT-46, PT-48 and PT-60, which gamely launched their torpedoes at the Japanese battlewagons but failed to score any hits. *Kurita* then set course back to Rabaul, leaving devastation behind him: 48 of Henderson's 90 aircraft had been destroyed, almost all its fuel burned in a 24-hour conflagration; the field was badly holed, and 41 Marines were left dead. The Japanese soldiers on Guadalcanal were heartened by the show and asked for a repeat performance. Yamamoto obliged them on the night of October 14 by unleashing Vice Admiral Gunichi Mikawa with the heavy cruisers *Chokai* and lucky *Kinugasa*, which pounded the field with 752 shells. Of the original participants from the mauled Cruiser Division 6, *Kinugasa* at least had the satisfaction of accomplishing her original mission—three days late.

The next morning, the Americans were subjected to the humiliating spectacle of Japanese transports, covered by destroyers and aircraft, landing more troops off Tassafaronga in broad daylight. The Japanese had every reason to feel a renewed confidence, even within sight of their bloodied foes, but they had not reckoned on the determination of Maj. Gen. Roy S. Geiger, the Marine air commander, and of his men, who managed to fill the shell craters and restore Henderson Field to operational status.

Told that there was no fuel left for his remaining aircraft, Geiger angrily roared: "Then by God, find some!"

Scrounging from hidden caches, siphoning from grounded machines, his men fueled their aircraft and went after the Japanese in a full day of aerial combat and attacks by a hodgepodge of U.S. Army, Navy and Marine aircraft. Three large transports were beached, three more, were disabled and 15 Japanese bombers and five fighters were shot down for the loss of three American dive-bombers and four fighters. The Japanese retired. In contrast to the first half of the month's landings, the "morning commuters' Tokyo Express" of 15 October had taken heavy casualties, and the Americans on Guadalcanal felt fresh hope.

It was a fragile hope all the same. On the same day, the U.S. Navy, desperate to replenish the fuel stocks at Henderson, sent a makeshift "Express" of its own from Espiritu Santo, consisting of the cargo ships *Bellatrix* and *Alchiba*, the PT-boat tender *Jamestown* and the fleet tug *Vireo*, each towing a barge carrying 1,000 barrels of gasoline and 500 quarter-ton bombs, and escorted by the destroyers *Nicholas* and *Meredith*. At dawn, the makeshift convoy was spotted by a Japanese search plane 75 miles from Guadalcanal, and at 6:08 a.m., Admiral Ghormley ordered all ships but the *Meredith* and *Vireo* to turn back. At 12:15, *Vireo* and *Meredith* were caught by 27 aircraft from the carrier *Zuikaku* and, although the destroyer claimed three of the enemy it was sunk. After three days on overcrowded rafts, 73 survivors were found and recovered by the destroyers *Grayson* and *Gwin* and by the tug *Seminole*.

The U.S. Navy Commander-in-Chief Pacific, Admiral Chester W. Nimitz, summed up the situation in the days following the American victory at Cape Esperance in three sentences: "It now appears that we are unable to control the sea

in the Guadalcanal area. Thus our supply of the positions will only be done at great expense to us. The situation is not hopeless, but it is certainly critical." As if to underline his words, the heavy cruisers *Myoko* and *Maya* contributed 800 8-inch shells to the misery of the Americans ashore, while their destroyer escorts added a further 300 5-inchers.

Still the Americans hung on, the nadir of their ordeal on Guadalcanal. On October 17, the patrolling destroyers *Aaron Ward*—which had arrived at Cape Esperance too late to participate in the battle—and *Lardner* struck a substantial blow at the enemy when they destroyed a major coastal supply depot for the Tokyo Express west of Kokumbona. Seven B-17s, guided by the fires, followed up the raids and completed the job of destruction, thereby denying vital supplies to the Japanese Army as it prepared for a final onslaught to annihilate the enemy and retake Henderson. After a three-day delay, the Japanese made their assault with the resources at hand, but the weary U.S. Marines and their Army reinforcements held their positions with grim determination, and between 22 and 26 October, a succession of Japanese attacks were repulsed with heavy losses.

At that same time, in the Santa Cruz Islands, the opposing navies squared off for another carrier duel, in which the Japanese succeeded in sinking the U.S. carrier *Hornet* but lost so many aircraft in the process that for once they were unable to take advantage of the victory—just as the Americans had been unable to follow-up successfully on Cape Esperance. The dueling battles for possession of the islands, and the direction of the war in the Pacific, remained to be fought.

Cape Esperance occupies a minor place in the history books because of its lack of decisive status—lost among the series of bloody encounters that it typified. It had gained the Marine airmen on Henderson Field a reprieve, but only a temporary one, from the succession of nocturnal bombardments to come. It had demonstrated the potential of radar, while allowing the Americans to challenge the Japanese Navy's fighting supremacy by night. But on this occasion, technology gave way to the human factors of ingenuity, miscalculation and courage. The Japanese made the greater blunders, which cost them the most, but a complete rout was averted by the initiative and swiftness with which their ships' crews recovered, as well as by the confusion that had hampered their American antagonists.

Subsequent battles were to reveal Japanese slowness in fully appreciating the potential of American radar, apparent at Cape Esperance, where the Americans had not fully mastered its early shortcomings. Furthermore, the failure of the surprised Japanese to bring their torpedoes into play misled the Americans into dismissing them as a serious threat and into believing that gunfire from Scott's single column—which had been maneuvered in a dangerously unwieldy fashion and which prevented his own destroyers from effectively bringing their own torpedoes into play—was sufficient to master a night engagement, conclusions which would cost them heavily later on. In this respect, the Battle of Cape Esperance set the pattern for a series of repetitious and bloody night actions in the Solomons over the next year. Each side had seriously underestimated the other and, more tragically, both had learned little from the experience. Ironically but understandably, it was the winners, the Americans, who learned the least. The knowledge necessary to derail the Tokyo Express would come later; the terrible price included RearAdmiral Norman Scott, who would die one month later exactly as had Rear Admiral Aritomo Goto, on the shattered bridge of his flagship in the even-more-confused naval Battle of Guadalcanal.

Jon Guttman writes from South Nyack, N.J. Recommended readings include Death of a Navy *by Andrieu d'Albas and* The Two-Ocean War *by Samuel Eliot Morison.*

TOP: An antiaircraft crew keeps on its toes. Though the U.S. had air superiority, surviving Japanese carriers provided air cover for supply and warships. ABOVE: After the Esperance fracas, a Japanese ship that didn't make it tips a forlorn and perpetual bottoms-up salute.

Rock Force Assault

At Corregidor, the American airborne "jump" onto the cratered and pitted Topside was tough enough. Afterwards, though, there still remained the cliffside caves bristling with defenders.

By Edward M. Flanagan, Jr.

Corregidor, that rocky, tadpole-shaped island guarding the entrance to Manila Bay, for too long had been a symbol of the ignominious defeat and surrender of the American and Filipino forces in the Philippines in May of 1942. By early 1945, its recapture was vitally important—not only to wipe out memories of the brutal and humiliating Bataan Death March, but also to open Manila Bay to Allied shipping in the campaign to complete the liberation of the long-suffering Philippines.

Corregidor's sheer cliffs and dug-in defenses almost totally precluded an amphibious landing. It therefore fell to the U.S. Army's 503rd Parachute Infantry Regimental Combat Team to assault the fortress island by parachute, although the 3rd Battalion of the 34th infantry would stage a supplementary amphibious landing at South Dock two hours after the 3rd Battalion of the 503rd jumped on Corregidor's Topside.

At 8:30 on the morning of February 16, men of the 503rd's 3rd Battalion started their jump onto Topside into a headwind of 25 miles per hour. The drop zones were tiny, bomb-cratered and littered with the wreckage of pre-World War II buildings. At 12:44 p.m., the 2nd Battalion jumped onto Topside in the face of even worse conditions—and now the Air Corps and Navy could no longer pound Topside, and the Japanese defenders could crawl out of their caves and tunnels. By nightfall, however, both battalions had established perimeters around the blasted ruins of the concrete buildings on Topside. During the next few days, the regiment, now completed by the 1st Battalion, which had come in over the secure beach at South Dock, cleaned up Topside and began the task of flushing out the caves dug into the cliffs below, a difficult, painstaking process that would take days...

Captain Hudson C. Hill and Lieutenant Larry Brown crawled slowly and stealthily toward the cliff edge overlooking Wheeler Point on the southeast corner of Corregidor's Topside plateau. It was 6 p.m. on February 22, 1945. The setting sun—which always seems to drop like a hot iron ball in the tropical evenings—sank over the South China Sea and cast ominous shadows and a subdued red glow over the steep, rocky face of the cliff. At the edge of the plateau, Hill and

Above the cratered wreck that was Corregidor, a C-47 drops supplies to U.S. troops on February 17, 1945, the day after the Americans returned. In the battered highlands of the island's Topside plateau, elements of the 503rd Airborne Infantry made a perilous jump—and found a surprisingly large number of Japanese spoiling for a fight.

Crewmen of the Cabot *watch a stricken Japanese plane turn into a flaming speck and go down between their ship and the* Bunker Hill *on June 19, 1944. A year later, General Douglas MacArthur's much-publicized "I shall return" vow, made in 1942 at Corregidor, seemed about to come true when—in an effort to open Manila Bay—America again focused on the island.*

Brown lay flat on their stomachs and peered over. What they saw "sent a cold chill running up and down my spine," Captain Hill wrote later. In fact, in the past six days, Captain Hill had had a succession of spine-chilling battles—Wheeler Point would be yet another.

Hill was commander of Company E of the 503rd Parachute Infantry Regimental Combat Team's 2nd Battalion; Lieutenant Brown also was with the 2nd Battalion. Earlier that afternoon, Major Lawson B. Caskey, their battalion's commanding officer, had held a meeting with his company commanders in one of the shattered rooms of the old Topside "Mile-Long" Barracks. Hill's E Company was to "relieve Company C, 1st Battalion . . . at 0730 23 February at Searchlight Point and destroy the enemy in that general area." To Hudson Hill, that meant, *wipe them out*, from Searchlight to Wheeler Point.

By February 1945, the structure in which Major Caskey had his command post was a bombed-out ruin of the once formidable concrete and steel barracks that had housed the prewar soldiers of Corregidor. The Japanese in 1942, and the Americans again, in January and February 1945, had blasted every gun emplacement and building on Corregidor with tons of artillery or bombs. American planes had pounded the island in the two weeks before the 503rd jumped there on February 16. The Navy had helped pulverize Japanese defenses on the island. By the time the two battalion combat teams of the 503rd made their perilous jumps on Topside, the island was cratered with thousands of bomb and shell holes; barracks, quarters, administrative buildings, hospital, club and post exchange were masses of crumpled concrete and bent reinforcing rods of steel; vegetation across the island had been burned and blown down, fortuitously uncovering many of the cave and tunnel entrances behind which the Japanese had hunkered down; the mammoth coast artillery was blasted into uselessness; the terrain was littered with tin sheets blown off the roofs of buildings; all roads were covered with rock slides, debris and tree limbs. In short, the two-square-mile island was a wasteland, a battered remnant of its former tidiness.

On February 16, Captain Hill had attempted to jump his company onto the littered and cratered Parade Ground in front of the "Long Barracks." This so-called drop zone, which under no other circumstances would be used for even a platoon jump, was only about 325 yards long by 250 yards wide. It was bounded on three sides by demolished concrete buildings and, on the south by the sheer cliffs of Topside, which rose 600 feet from the water's edge.

Topside's nine-hole golf course, the other drop zone, was battered, cratered and no longer recognizable as a golf course and was even smaller than the Parade Ground. But the paratroopers had one advantage: the Topside area was so improbable that the Japanese commander at Corregidor, Navy Captain Akira Itagaki, did not plan for an airborne attack, even though his superiors in Tokyo and Manila had warned him to guard against one. Instead, Itagaki put half of his men along the beaches at the foot of James, Cheney and Ramsay Ravines. These strong defensive positions were designed to defeat the amphibious attack Itagaki expected to come from the north, from the Bataan Peninsula. The other half of his men he kept in reserve near Malinta Hill or in the tunnels beneath it. American Intelligence had estimated, erroneously, that there were some 850 Japanese on the island. In actuality, Itagaki had 5,000 men, including a large contingent of Japanese Imperial Marines, well-trained and highly disciplined. They had landed on Corregidor just a few weeks before the American "Rock Force" attack.

When the 3rd Battalion Combat Team jumped at 0833 on the 16th (three minutes behind schedule), the Japanese defenders were holed up in caves, tunnels, concrete gun emplacements and ammo pits around the island, forced under cover by the relentless shelling and strafing of the island right up to jump time. But when the second lift, including Hill's company, came in at 12:44 p.m. that same day, the Japanese had been able to crawl out of their defensive positions and attack the second wave, both in the air and on the ground. In addition, the second wave had to jump in a wind of 25 to 30 knots, causing the jumpers to smash into the ground, slam against buildings or drift helplessly over cliffs. The two battalions jumped a total of 2,050 men; they suffered 280 casualties, or a 14 percent rate.

The scattered drop of the first echelon produced one unexpected blessing—25 or 30 paratroopers were blown over the cliff near Breakwater Point. Captain Itagaki and a number of his staff officers were at an outpost near Breakwater Point,

on a road halfway down the cliff. They were apparently watching U.S. landing craft rounding Geary Point, headed for the amphibious landing at South Dock. Because they were down the cliff, Itagaki and his staff were apparently unaware of the parachute landings above them.

As the errant paratroopers landed all around Itagaki and his officers, the Japanese began shooting, but the troopers ducked, assembled into some semblance of a fire unit and attacked Itagaki and his staff. The Americans wiped out all but one or two of the Japanese at no loss, incredibly, to themselves. Itagaki's aide, later captured, confirmed that Itagaki had been killed in the attack. From this point on, the Japanese on the island were without centralized control. Moreover, in addition to losing their commander, the Japanese lost their communications center to some of the first troops who landed on Topside. Thus, from the very beginning of the attack, all Japanese units were isolated in their respective positions.

In the next five days, Captain Hill's E Company eliminated the enemy from the area in and around James Ravine. Hill had three missions in the ravine: destroy the enemy in his underground infantry barracks, determine the serviceability of the fresh-water pumping station known to have been in use when Corregidor surrendered in May 1942, and locate and destroy the electrical system which activated the mines between Corregidor and the Bataan Peninsula, mines which were harassing Navy ships operating in those waters.

For two especially difficult days before February 22, the Japanese, in caves and holes along the path had frustrated Company E's efforts to get to the bottom of the ravine. But at 0900 on the 19th, the company broke through.

Somehow the Japanese had been lulled into a false sense of security. Lead scouts of E Company moved forward against no opposition and found three abandoned machine guns which were set up in firing position and amply supplied with ammo. But then the Japanese woke up. The lead platoon heard a loud commotion from the bottom of the ravine, followed by a barrage of fire from a point partway up its side. According to Hill: "Japs came streaming out of the entrance to the underground barracks. It was slaughter. Sixty-five Japs were killed before they stopped coming. Apparently they were pushing out to man their defensive positions. Why they had not maintained security is a secret known only to the Japanese."

Hill had one squad fire steadily on the entrance to the barracks to keep the enemy bottled up. Then his demolitions men placed explosives around the entrance and down the ventilation shafts. They also dropped five-gallon cans of napalm down the ventilators. "The resulting explosions ended for all time organized resistance in James Ravine," Hill decided. He was almost, but not quite, correct.

After the barracks had been neutralized, he moved E Company to the pumping station at the foot of the ravine. The station had been destroyed beyond any hope of repair. Hill immediately radioed this discouraging information to his battalion CP. The destruction of the pumping station meant that the entire force on Topside would have to rely on air-dropped water, until it could open the road to the amphibious forces which had landed at South Dock. This action would take a few days. Meanwhile, the paratroopers on Topside were parched: the two canteens of water they had jumped with did not go far in tropical heat and intense fighting.

By now, Captain Hill had accomplished two of his missions in James Ravine. His last mission was to find and destroy the electrical mine-control system.

He sent a few squads out to search the ravine for the cave or dugout that contained the control system. At 4:20 that afternoon, a squad found the control system in a cave near the underground barracks. One paratrooper was killed before Hill's men eliminated the few Japanese still inside. The system consisted of about 100 knife switches connected in series

TOP: Colonel George M. Jones of the 503rd lays out his battle plan in a briefing before the fateful drop in which some men crashed into concrete ruins and trees or drifted into the ocean. MIDDLE: Those who made it safely down found themselves facing far more opposition than Intelligence had predicted—but the Americans had the element of surprise. ABOVE: The wasteland of the heavily shelled plateau concealed a labyrinth of underground installations, including barracks and gun positions.

to a power source of six storage batteries, each about the size of a GI footlocker. A cable disappeared underground and then underwater to the mines off shore. Hill's demolition men made short work of the mine-control system.

After accomplishing the last of his three missions, Hill brought the company back to the battalion perimeter for the night. For the next three days, he continued to mop up the 19 caves in James Ravine. The action cost him 10 more killed and 11 wounded. His company had killed at least 211 Japanese and taken one POW, a civilian engineer. Hill also estimated that 250 more of the enemy died in the underground barracks attack.

On the afternoon of February 22, Hill reorganized his company for the attack on Wheeler Point. Now down to four officers and 71 men, he formed the company into two rifle platoons with three nine-man squads and one 60mm-mortar platoon with two four-man squads. With this force he was ready to take on the formidable task of "reducing" the area from Searchlight Point to Wheeler Point.

After Hill and Lieutenant Brown had reconnoitered the area from the cliff, they went back to Hill's CP at the west end of the Long Barracks. There they made a detailed study of aerial photos taken two days previously and of all other intelligence which the units fighting in the area had gathered. Hill found there were only two routes to Searchlight and Wheeler Points: one was a bomb-cratered road halfway down the cliff face, and the other was the beach, about 50 feet wide at its widest point. The beach was bounded by Searchlight, Unknown and Wheeler Points. Hill noted with concern that, because of the intense shelling and bombing before the jump, neither the roadway nor the beach offered any cover for troops moving along them.

The aerial photos revealed one fortified cave just above the beach at Searchlight Point, three fortified caves between the roadway and the beach to Unknown Point, one concrete emplacement halfway up the cliff at Wheeler Point, a pillbox at the end of Wheeler Point, and a fortified tunnel entrance at the end of the roadway on Wheeler Point—the tunnel led underground to the magazines of Crockett and Wheeler Batteries. It obviously was the strongest position, the one which would give Hill and his company the most trouble. Brown estimated that there were between 175 and 200 of the enemy in the area from Searchlight to Wheeler Points, armed with machine guns, rifles and grenades.

Prisoners and captured documents revealed that the enemy in the area were part of the Endo Force, composed of Imperial Japanese Marines selected for their height (all of them were six feet tall—or over) and their fighting ability. Just after dawn on the 19th, 300 of the Marines had swarmed out of the Wheeler Point area and raced across the Parade Ground right up to the Long Barracks before they were stopped.

For the attack in the Wheeler Point area, Hill and E Company would be supported by one U.S. Navy destroyer, a demolitions assault team from regiment, two bazookas and a section of light machine guns on the cliff above Wheeler Point. His paratroopers would be delighted to learn how accurate the naval support was.

At 0730 in the morning, E Company would pass through and relieve C Company at Searchlight Point and attack toward Wheeler Point. The 1st and 3rd Battalions of the 503rd would be making a push toward the tail of the entire island starting at 10 a.m.

Hill's detailed plan called for 1st Lieut. Roscoe Corder's rifle platoon to attack along the roadway with one squad forward, followed by the light machine guns (LMGs). The other rifle platoon, led by 2nd Lieut. Lewis B. Crawford with a section of LMGs attached, would attack along the beach. Hill cautioned that it would be exposed every time it came around

FIRST MOMENTS ON TOPSIDE

At 12:44 p.m. on the 16th, Captain Hudson Hill's plane was over Wheeler Battery, the "Go" point for his single-filed string of C-47 Transports. He counted seven seconds to allow for the strong wind blowing directly into the flight path, but it turned out that seven seconds were not enough. Hill landed on a ruin southwest of the Corregidor's old parade ground.

When he hit the roof, his chute collapsed and he tumbled through the ruins to the ground floor. He survived the fall but lost seven teeth. Still, his landing inside the building was fortunate: the area outside was swept by Japanese machine-gun fire.

About 50 other men from E and F Companies were also trapped in and around the buildings by enemy machine-gun fire. Once Hill got out of his harness and oriented himself, he surveyed the area where he had crash-landed. Several men just west of the building had been killed while attempting to free themselves from their parachute harnesses.

Two of his men ran from the building in an attempt to help the men under fire. One was killed and the other seriously wounded.

Staff Sergeant Edward Gulsvich was one of the paratroopers who had landed outside the building into which Hill had crashed. Gulsvich had been seriously wounded by Japanese small-arms fire while descending. As he neared the ground, the Japanese were already out of their holes and attempting to "spear the jumpers on their bayonets as the men landed," Hill remembers.

Gulsvich landed, got out of his parachute, cocked his Thompson submachine gun, and "singlehandedly killed fourteen" before he was finally killed by machine-gun fire. Gulsvich was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross posthumously.

While this fighting was going on, 14 more Japanese ran out of the Cheney Battery gun pit and, with bayonets, attacked the men lying on the ground. Virtually every man in Hill's building opened fire from the windows and drove the Japanese off. Hill then began to gain some control of the situation. He assigned men to fire on specific areas outside the building; he yelled to those still on the ground to keep lying flat until he could get help; he used his radio to contact his executive officer, Lieutenant Donald E. Abbott.

Hill told Abbott of the situation he faced. Abbott reported that about 60 men of the company had reached the west end of the Long Barracks and that one stick of eight men had jumped too soon and had drifted over the cliff edge south of Crockett Battery. Hill ordered Abbott to get the artillery to fire "point blank" at the pillboxes near Cheney and Wheeler Batteries.

By 2 p.m., Hill heard what he had been waiting for—the noise of the pack 75s firing, the whistle of the rounds overhead, the blast as they slammed into pillboxes and caves near Cheney and Wheeler Batteries. The machine-gun fire "abruptly ended."

Hill then proceeded to clear up his small section of the battlefield. He sent men to carry the dead and wounded toward the parade ground.

By 2:50 p.m. he had moved his men to the company assembly area at the west end of the Long Barracks. He had jumped in seven officers and 132 men; after he finished counting noses, he had six officers and 95 men who were effective. By the morning of the 17th, however, the eight men who had drifted over the cliff were back.

one of the points. "Therefore," Hill ordered, "you will not, repeat, not move around the points until I give you the order to do so." Corder's 2nd Platoon would have to advance to each point to cover Crawford's 3rd Platoon as it advanced.

Captain Hill directed his demolitions section from the 503rd regimental headquarters to follow behind 2nd Platoon, ready to help assault the fortified positions. The mortar platoon would follow the demolitions section, to cover the company's rear and to support the attack with mortar fire when called for. Hill pointed out that Lieutenant Brown would be on the cliff's edge with two bazookas, a section of LMGs and fire-direction teams. He, himself, would be behind the lead squad on the road.

The night of February 22 was kind to E Company. There were no major attacks on its perimeter and only one minor attempt at infiltration. At 0600 the next morning, the company assembled and drew supplies. It moved out at 0630 "on the nose." Just 25 minutes later the lead elements of the company arrived at Searchlight Point.

Hill told his platoon leaders that he would take his radio, go out on Searchlight Point and register the destroyer on Unknown Point. Then he would ask for a five-minute "pasting" of the target. He also told the machine-gun section chief to fire on Unknown Point. The roadway platoon would move around Searchlight Point under cover of the destroyer fire and, when it lifted, would move in on Unknown Point, covered by the machine-gun fire.

With those details settled, Hill went to the top of the point again and asked for a ranging round from the destroyer. In three minutes the destroyer fired, and the round landed halfway up the vertical side of Unknown Point. The second round hit the roadway along the ridge line of Unknown Point "dead center." The third round hit about 50 yards above the road on the face of the cliff. Hill was satisfied. "The Navy can really shoot," he wrote after the battle.

It was now 0730. He told the Navy to "lay it on," and the destroyer began to fire five-gun salvos with precision. (He learned later that the destroyer had been compiling firing data with her range-control instruments since dawn.)

While the destroyer was firing, 3rd Platoon had gone down on the beach. At 0735, the destroyer fire lifted, and machine guns started firing from a point above the roadway. Lieutenant Corder led his roadway platoon around the point with some haste, but safely.

And now began the two-pronged company's hours-long ordeal—a step-by-step advance in minute detail, cave by cave, outcrop by outcrop. . .cover me, and I'll cover you, with grenades, rifle and machine-gun fire. Halfway up steep Unknown Point from the beach level was one especially "tough" cave.

The beach platoon's Lieutenant Crawford moved his men well up the beach toward Unknown Point, out of range of the "halfway" cave and in position to outflank it. He then directed his machine gun to fire on the entrance while he crept up to the cave and tossed in two white phosphorous grenades. With the enemy momentarily blinded, the machine gunners raced up the beach to a more secure position.

But the cave angled back from the cliff face. Crawford knew he had to get to its other side and fire directly from in front or from its flank. He ran across the face of the cave, firing his machine gun in short bursts as he ran. The Japanese inside continued to fire, but they hit only Crawford's canteen. From his new position, Crawford fired into the cave, permitting more of his men to cross to positions from which they could help. Then the defenders threw a number of grenades, and 11 of them charged. Crawford and his men killed nine as they climbed over the barricade in front of the cave.

Crawford and his men entered the cave and found 47 dead Japanese, 42 rifles and a badly damaged machine gun. Craw-

TOP: Plagued by their reverses in the Pacific, the Japanese mount a Kamikaze attack from an airfield on the outskirts of Manila. MIDDLE: As Americans retake island after island in the Philippines, the war on land becomes much more "up close and personal." A Ranger unit scouts out a settlement on one of the smaller islands. ABOVE: Apparently as weary as his guard, a Japanese prisoner undergoes interrogation.

The long, tortuous advance in the Philippines continues. Near more populated areas, the battlelines were more clearly defined than on the scarred slopes of Corregidor. At Intramuros, GIs land opposite the city, where the Japanese hold hostages. But of all the American units, none was prouder than the men of the 503rd Airborne—particularly company E. "Although tired beyond reason, they held their heads high," said Captain Hudson C. Hill.

ford also found out why the Japanese had been able to withstand the gun-fire and grenades which his platoon had poured into the cave: a trench dug across the interior of the cave could hold at least 12 men.

The stretch from Searchlight Point to Unknown Point was now clear, but there remained the final assault upon Wheeler Point. There the Japanese had their concrete emplacement, their pillbox, more caves and the malignant-looking tunnel. Led by Lieutenant Corder and his roadway platoon, the main action would focus upon the troublesome tunnel.

Destroyer fire obliterated the concrete emplacement, but only one round struck the pillbox, which was protected by an outcrop of rock. The Navy then shifted its fire, nine salvos directly on the tunnel entrance—many of the rounds slammed inside the tunnel. At 1:05 p.m. the fire of the destroyer lifted, and Lieutenante Corder moved his men forward along the roadway.

For a few minutes, they advanced with no difficulty. But, five yards from the tunnel entrance, "all hell broke loose." The entrance was protected by a circular outer wall of earth and rock about 18 inches high. Thus some of the defenders were still able to fight even after the shelling.

Nine of the enemy ran out of the tunnel hurling hand grenades as they charged. In addition, a Japanese machine gun started firing from the side port of the pillbox at the end of Wheeler Point. Fortunately, all but one American was in prone position when the firing started. The one man standing was hit.

But the Japanese must have been temporarily blinded coming out of the dark cave, and they threw their hand grenades harmlessly over the cliff. Hill's light machine gun and the fire from the lead squads cut them all down.

With Corder's men near the tunnel, Hill had to suspend the fire of his machine gun covering the tunnel entrance. This permitted the Japanese inside to continue their return fire. Corder then directed one squad to fire into the tunnel entrance while the other squad took up a position behind the curved barricade in front. At this point, the battle for the tunnel was a stalemate. The paratroopers tried to throw grenades into the tunnel, but, because of a baffle on the inside floor of the tunnel, they were scarcely effective. The Japanese were equally ineffective with their grenades, which either fell on their side of the short wall or went over the cliff.

Hill had to make a decisive move to end the stalemate. He brought forward the BAR men of the other two squads and all men armed with Tommy guns. He planned to have everyone around the barricade throw grenades simultaneously and then stand up and spray the interior of the tunnel.

The first attempt was not successful. One paratrooper was killed and two wounded by heavy fire from the tunnel. Hill then crawled around the wall and coached each man to throw his grenade just over the wall inside the tunnel. All would then fire low and deep into the tunnel entrance.

Hill went back to the center of the wall. When he saw that they were all ready, he raised his carbine as a signal; the men threw grenades "almost as one man." Immediately they stood up and poured fire into the tunnel. The result of the second attempt was far better than the first. The enemy fire slackened perceptibly, and paratroopers outside the tunnel entrance could hear shouting from the inside.

Suddenly, the Japanese fire stopped. Corder's men slowed their fire. Private First Class W.A. Brown and Private Howard J. Jandro moved cautiously to the entrance and were almost to the mouth of the tunnel when 14 Japanese came racing out. "We had been nicely sucked in," Hill said later. The next ten minutes were chaos.

A few of the Japanese who came out, armed only with grenades and one saber, grabbed Brown and his companion. A Japanese officer hacked at Brown using "short, choppy strokes." Then Corder's men moved in, firing their weapons from the hip. Those they didn't kill, they wrestled in hand-to-hand fighting. The paratroopers pulled the two privates away from the enemy and killed or wounded all of the Japanese. Brown had been fatally injured by the *Samurai* saber attack; Jandro suffered only a few bumps on the head from being battered with his own helmet. A few of the other men had been "banged up." The paratroopers were still standing after their hand-to-hand fight and were in good position to meet the next *banzai* attack. And this time they killed 17 of the enemy.

Memorable landmarks in a nightmarish scramble from the golf course and parade ground drop zones are Wheeler and Searchlight Points. Even after intensive pre-landing bombardment, there seemed no end to pillboxes and other coastal defenses to neutralize. There were even gun pits beneath burned-out trucks and other debris. During the attack, shootouts took place in dark tunnels and hand-to-hand combat sometimes pitted bayonets against curved Japanese swords.

Next, seven more Japanese charged out of the tunnel behind a shower of grenades, most of which went over the cliff. Captain Hill and several of his men were wounded, but again they managed to kill all of the Japanese. Hill was not hurt badly enough to require evacuation.

It was now 3:30 p.m. After the last enemy foray from the tunnel, there was silence inside.

After five minutes, the silence was shattered by rifle fire from inside the tunnel. Jandro and 1st Lieut. Emory N. Ball were killed. The Japanese stormed out again, this time 22 strong. They ran with such speed that most of them leaped or fell over the barricade and stumbled down the cliffside. Their charge carried Pfc. Ralph F. Janas with them, but he grabbed a strong bush just over the cliff and saved himself. Another Japanese grappled with Pfc. Gerald G. Kirkpatrick, who killed him with his trench knife. The rest of the Japanese on top were killed by small-arms fire.

After this attack ended, Hill's ammunition was low. Hill ordered the troops in the rear to forward all of the ammunition they could gather. Only two BAR magazines and two bandoleers of rifle rounds came forward. The machine guns in the rear were down to 50 rounds apiece.

Under these circumstances, Hill decided to withdraw immediately. He sent Corder's platoon down the roadway, carrying the dead and wounded. While it was withdrawing, a shot from atop the tunnel entrance hit Hill's radio operator, T-5 George A. Chuises, in the hand; another shot hit the radio, putting it out of commission. Hill directed the machine-gun section to spray the area with its remaining ammunition. Then he ordered his radio operator, his platoon leader Corder and a few men remaining near the tunnel to head for the cut in the roadway. Hill was the last man out.

The company had fought its way over 700 yards of difficult terrain in about nine hours. It had killed, by actual count, 110 Japanese, and left many more dead in the blasted caves. E Company had three dead. A fourth later died of wounds, four were wounded seriously enough to be evacuated, and 11 were wounded slightly.

Somehow, the news of E Company's intense, dramatic fight had reached the other paratroopers on Topside. As the company filed wearily across the Parade Ground, other paratroopers would come up, offer a cigarette, or a highly prized canteen of water, or lift a man's rifle off his shoulder and carry it along. As Hill remembers: "Some tried to help the tired men along, but were firmly shaken off. It was a proud company! Although tired beyond reason, they held their heads high."

For the next few days, the 503rd and the 3rd Battalion of the 34th continued to kill Japanese, whom they forced out of tunnels and caves and the ruins of buildings with flame throwers and smoke grenades. On February 24, Colonel George M. Jones, the Rock Force Commander, decided that Topside was secure enough to begin a sweep toward the east and the tail of the island. By the 26th, the 1st battalion of the 503rd had reached Monkey Point, a small hill overlooking Kindley Field, the dirt strip on the east end of the island. Monkey Point was directly above the Radio Intercept Tunnel, inside of which the Japanese had stored tons of explosives. At noon on the 26th, an explosion in the Radio Intercept Tunnel blew off the top of Monkey Point. The blast was so powerful that it turned over a 35-ton Sherman tank and formed a cavity where Monkey Point had been. The 1st Battalion lost 52 men killed and 144 wounded. The Japanese blew up 150 of their own men in the tunnel.

By February 27, the Japanese on Corregidor could no longer offer any organized resistance.

On March 2, 1945, General Douglas MacArthur returned triumphantly to the island. At a ceremony on Topside, he said to Colonel Jones and the men of the Rock Force: "I see the old flagpole still stands. Have your troops hoist the colors to its peak and let no enemy ever haul them down." □

"Fly" Flanagan, retired U.S. Army Lieutenant General, made his first combat jump south of Manila during the liberation of the Philippines. A master parachutist and helicopter pilot, he also served in the Korean and Vietnam Wars, headed the Green Beret Training Center at Fort Bragg, N.C., and retired as Commanding General, U.S. Sixth Army. As further readings, try his own Corregidor, The Rock Force Assault; *or* Retaking the Philippines *by William B. Breuer.*

A pro provides guidance through the forest of material on the war while adding his own fast-paced narrative.

By Richard Montpelier

Robert Leckie begins with the armistice at the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month in 1918, and by Page 946 seems to have encompassed it all, the story of World War II in a single volume. The narrative of his *Delivered From Evil: The Saga of World War II* (Harper & Row, 1987, $29.95), virtually races along. The minute "filler" detail, if cast as ingots, would fill a freight car or two. And the cameo biographies of the wartime leaders are by themselves, well worth the price of the entire book.

The historian-writer has published 28 books in all, among others, his *The Wars of America*; a history of the Korean War; the story of Guadalcanal; a history of the U.S. Marines against the Japanese in the Pacific; a history of the 1st Marine Division's breakout from Chosin in Korea, and his own autobiographical account of war in the Pacific, *Helmet for My Pillow*.

Infantrymen ready a mortar at Saint-Malo in 1944. Such sharp vignettes are preserved despite the massive scope of Robert Lecki's book that manages to tell the full and yet detailed story of World War II in 946 pages.

In short, he is an accomplished craftsman at his trade who has produced yet another accomplished book (this one, though, really does *sing*), and so one might wonder where such a "pro" looks for his material on such an epic subject. The problem of course being no *lack* of such material, but rather the surfeit of material to be distilled and crammed into even 946 pages of text.

As Leckie himself acknowledges in his *Bibliographical Note* at the end of his latest book, it is nearly a problem. "In my own library alone there are about 700 titles on the subject," he says, "and I possess only a few dozen of the hundreds upon hundreds of unit histories—about divisions, squadrons, submarines, air forces, aircraft carriers and so forth—that are extant."

Clearly, Leckie, like any historian-writer approaching such massive iceberg of story, had to make hard choices early in the game. One, a blessing for most of his readers, was to dispense with footnotes on sources. "Because of space limitations, and because I have attempted to write a swiftly moving narrative, I have decided not to include footnotes, which might have delayed and detoured it."

The risk resulting, he concedes, could be the suspicion that he "made it up," that he produced what the U.S. Marines call "sea stories." He didn't of course, and he lists titles going on seven pages as his *Selected Bibliography*. What may interest either the dedicated student of World War II or the casual reader, however, is Leckie's continuing *Note*, in which he comments on the books that he found useful for one reason or another. For here, as a tour guide leading the way through a forest of material on the war, is a working pro who knows his way around.

Explaining that he often took his quotes from the speaker's own memoirs, such as Dwight Eisenhower's *Crusade in Europe*, Leckie points out that Omar Bradley's *A Soldier's Story* is "an excellent and surprisingly lively narrative."

Among biographies of major wartime figures, Leckie calls Stephen Ambrose's *Eisenhower* "magnificent," and Desmond Young's *Rommel: The Desert Fox* "smaller though equally enthralling."

Further: "Among the numerous biographies of Hitler, Robert Payne's *The Life and Death of Adolf Hitler* was the deepest mine of information. . . and the same may be said of *Duce!*, Richard Collier's penetrating and engaging biography of Mussolini. Although studies of Stalin also abound, few were as useful to this writer as Edward Ellis Smith's *The Young Stalin*."

And there's more, much more of the *flora* and *fauna* pointed out by the experienced Mr. Leckie.

For the soldierly experience "at the cannon's mouth," he is high on Guy Sajer's *The Forgotten Soldier* ("the incredible suffering of the men who fought for Hitler on the Eastern Front, as well as the *Wehrmacht's* hideously brutal discipline"); his own *Helmet for My Pillow* ("the humor and horror of the Pacific War"); or Hans Habe's *A Thousand Shall Fall* ("melancholy account of the disintegration of the French will to fight"). Furthermore, "In *The Taste of Courage*, a massive anthology put together by Desmond Flower and James Reeves, there resides a veritable treasure trove of dramatic incident and anecdote gathered from hundreds of participants such as Else Wendel, a German *Hausfrau*, and Ivan Krylov, a Soviet staff officer."

Among the scores of military historians spawned by the great conflict as its leading experts, Leckie cannot possibly list them all. . . but he can "admit his debt to the extraordinary diligence and

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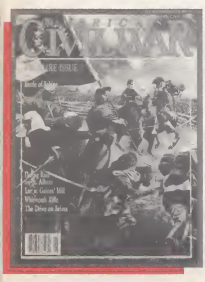

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perception of two of them." As that pair, he refers to the British Max Hastings and his book *Overlord* ("a complete and stirring history of D-Day and the Battle for Normandy") and the American Charles B. MacDonald, whose *A Time for Trumpets* is "a similarly thorough and human narrative of the Battle of the Bulge, in which he himself fought."

Official histories, adds Leckie, often are dull, "more about maps than chaps, geography than biography." But those spawned by World War II, "at least on the American side, are often first class." Thus he recommends the 96-volume *History of the U.S. Army in World War II* ("written by competent or better professional historians, usually civilians, under the aegis of the Office of the Chief of Military History"), along with the late Samuel Eliot Morison's "monumental, 15-volume" *History of United States Naval Operations in World War II*; the seven-volume history of *The Army Air Force in World War II* and the U.S. Marine Corps Historical Section's 15 monographs on the campaigns in the Pacific.

As Leckie concludes, "There are so many books on World War II!" And so many more are yet to come, no doubt . . . for those already in hand, though, Leckie is a consummate guide.

His own single-volume, highly narrative history of the war should, incidentally, be very high on anybody's list.

A Time for Giants: The Politics of the American High Command in World War II *by D. Clayton James, 1987. $19.95.*

Collectively, prior to 1942, the commanders of the American forces in World War II had rarely led men into battle, and yet of the 18 leaders featured in *A Time for Giants*, only one was relieved (and probably unduly) of his duties during the war. Seven of them, moreover had achieved five-star rank by 1944. How, then, did these basically inexperienced men earn their commands and how did they individually influence the outcome of the war?

As *A Time for Giants* answers these and other questions, it is well-documented, comprehensive, candid, and quite lively. It features brief (about 10-12 pages) profiles of the top commanders. Included are the well-known, such as Eisenhower, Marshall, MacArthur, Patton, and Nimitz, and the not so well-known, such as Eaker, Spruance and "Howling Mad" Smith, who ought to be.

But they were a remarkable group. Their lack of experience was rarely a severe handicap. Of Marshall and Eisenhower, D. Clayton James writes: "Neither man had led soldiers on a battlefield or had been the target of enemy fire. . . [but this] had not diminished their wartime leadership one iota."

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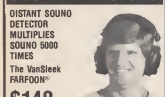

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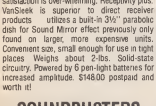

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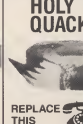

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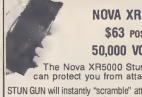

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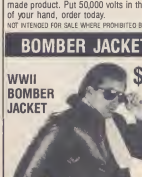

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One is struck, despite many other books, by the influence of politics in high command. The politicians, Roosevelt and Churchill among them, had to be persuaded and placated. Commanders of the various Allied armies often vociferously battled each other. General Omar Bradley was furious, threatening resignation, over what he perceived as preferential treatment given British Field Marshall Bernard Montgomery. The Australians, certainly against their wishes, were not too daintily shoved aside by General Douglas MacArthur, after they had performed so well in many previous vital engagements.

But there were also terrible rows among the U.S. commanders. The Navy adamantly opposed giving MacArthur greater authority in the Pacific. Amphibious tactics all too often brought heated confrontation between the Army, Navy, and the Marines.

By and large, however, James' deft treatment of the individual leaders stands out. Admiral Ernest King, "the most powerful naval officer in the history of the United States," was "so tough he shaves with a blow torch." Immediately after Pearl Harbor, he wanted his title acronym changed to COMINCH from CINCUS ("sink us").

Army Air Force General Carl "Tooey" Spaatz was an air daredevil. In an early air-to-air refueling test, he had fuel spilled all over him. Removing his clothes to ease the danger, he continued the flight in the nude, except for his parachute! Evaluating himself, Spaatz once remarked, "I owe my success to two things: I drink good whiskey and get other people to do my work."

Controversial Admiral William "Bull" Halsey (he detested the nickname), as an area commander was "the pivotal figure of the South Pacific." His appointment caused a near-brawl between two Marines, one of whom said getting Halsey was "like getting three carriers and two battleships." The other Marine argued Halsey "was worth three carriers and three battleships!"

General Henry "Hap" Arnold was a "maverick." Marine General Archer Vandegrift was "a Marine's Marine." General George Patton "seemed so born to war" and was the general the Germans feared the most. Eisenhower "knew what he was doing," and so on.

A Time for Giants is replete with such analyses and anecdotes. Yet it seriously and incisively considers the merits *and* flaws of the commanders and their decisions. It is a gripping and illuminating book, important in demonstrating how the largely inexperienced American command was so successful in conducting World War II.

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Armament

Continued from page 8

power on. Climbing and gliding turns had to be done with care to avoid a stall. And the landing gear was somewhat rigid. If the I-16 was bounced while landing, it would assume a nose-up attitude that would become progressively worse with each succeeding bounce unless the stick were pushed forward. The gear was a constant source of irritation to service pilots. Since it was operated by hand crank, it required numerous turns with considerable physical effort the higher it was raised. Then, when lowered, it would sometimes stick part way down. A cable cutter was often carried to release the gear so it could drop into position. Also, when raising the gear, the body motion on the hand crank would involuntarily be transmitted by the pilot to the joystick, causing an uneven flight path until the gear was secure.

Introduction of the I-16, Type 5, to service squadrons proved to be difficult. Accidents were so frequent that the I-16 was called Polikarpov's "Widow Maker." To counter this unfortunate situation, a two-place version was introduced on the production line. With this, and demonstrations of mock combat by leading Soviet fliers, the Type 5 began to catch on. It began to be called "*Yastrebok*" (Little Hawk), "*Yastreb*" (Hawk) and "*Mushka*" (Fly).

During the mid-Thirties a sort of euphoria characterized the Soviet fighter program. With the I-16 considered the fastest and most modern fighter of the time, the proud Soviets made no effort to conceal it. In October 1935 the I-16, Type 6, was displayed to the world at the Salone Internazionale Aeronautico in Milan. In spite of all the advanced features of the fighter, the aviation world seemed less than impressed.

The Spanish Civil War afforded an exceptionally good chance to try out the fledgling Red Air Force. Polikarpov I-15 biplane and I-16 monoplane fighters were shipped to the Republicans in the fall of 1936. At first, only Russians were allowed to fly the Soviet machines, but eventually they would pass them over to the Spanish. Among the foreign volunteers was ex-U.S. Navy pilot Frank Tinker, who flew the I-15 and later the I-16 with considerable success.

The I-16 was shipped in quantity to Spain. By the end of 1938 some 475 had arrived. Armed with two ShVAK rapid-firing 7.62mm machine guns in the wings, the Type 6 soon proved superior to anything the Nationalists had, except the Italian Fiat CR-32 and later the Messerschmitt BF-109.

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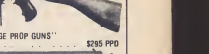

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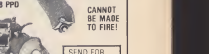

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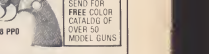

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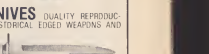

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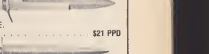

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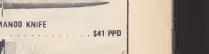

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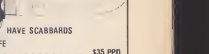

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pov's I-16 was called "*Mosca*" (Fly) by the Republicans and "*Rata*" (Rat) by the Nationalists. It was also called a "Boeing" by both sides and has not lived down that false legacy to this day. It held no monopoly on misidentification; the I-15 was called a "Curtiss," and Tupolev's fast SB-2 bomber was labeled a "Martin." The Russians did nothing to correct the situation. When the new four-gun I-16, Type 10, made its appearance in Spain, meanwhile, it was considered, equal to the early Messerschmitt.

Around the same time, in 1937 and 1938, 120 I-15 and I-16 fighters were sent to Changkiakow, China, to aid the Chinese against the invading Japanese. Under Russian tutelage, the Chinese converted from their Curtiss Hawk III biplanes to the Polikarpovs. By late 1939 the Russians had been called home, but the Chinese did considerable execution on unescorted Japanese bombers. With the introduction of the Imperial Navy's Mitsubishi A5M "Claude," however, the tables were turned. Combat was avoided when the bombers had escorts.

An incident on the Manchurian-Mongolian border between the Russians and the Japanese soon erupted into a full-scale but undeclared war between these two countries. The "Nomonhan Incident" at the Khalkhin-gol River began in May 1939 and lasted four months. Here the I-16, called "*Abu*" (Gadfly) by the Japanese, met the nimble Japanese Army Type 97 fighter. The Nakajima Ki-27, "Nate," was light in weight and also lightly armed. There was no armor protection for the pilot. It was considered marginally superior to the I-16 except in level speed and in a dive.

On August 20, 1939, five I-16's were the first to fly into combat armed with RS-82 rockets under their wings. The Russians claimed that they destroyed two Nates, but the Japanese denied that there were any losses that day.

Closer to home, the Soviets jumped on Finland in order to gain the Karelian Isthsmus. The resulting "Winter War" lasted from November 1939 until March 1940. The Finns had a rag-tag air arm made up of 145 obsolescent aircraft, but only 114 were airworthy. The Fokker D-21 monoplane was their fighter mainstay. Against this motley collection, the Russians deployed 900 aircraft of all types, including I-15 and I-16 fighters.

After a few weeks of fighting, the Russians were forced to increase their air strength to 1,500 aircraft. The sheer weight of numbers on the ground and in the air caused the Finns to capitulate, and hostilities ceased in March 1940. In the air war the Soviets had lost 200 aircraft to the 67 losses of the Finns.

On September 13, 1940, an event took place that should have alerted the Western Powers to Japan's military potential. That was when 27 Chinese I-15 and I-16 fighters over Chungking were surprised while returning to their base. The Japanese had just bombed the city—the bombers and their escorts "departed." The departure was a ruse. As the Japanese "Nells" left, 13 escorts turned around and climbed up-sun of the unsuspecting Chinese. The Japanese caught them completely unaware and tore into their formation. Two Chinese fighters collided in mid-air, and three pilots bailed out of undamaged aircraft. The rest were all shot down. Polikarpov's I-15

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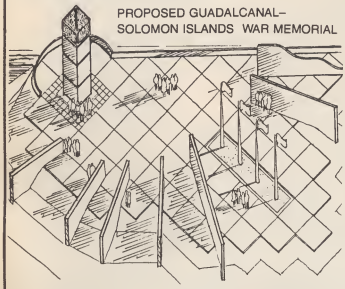

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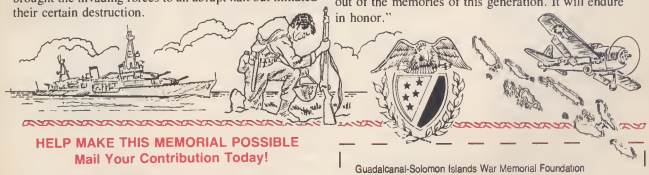

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This Finnish Air Force I-16's hand-cranked wheels have been replaced by skis. The Russian craft was used by several nations during the course of the war and flew against both Germans and Japanese.

and I-16 fighters thus had gained the dubious distinction of being the first aerial victims of Japan's brand-new wonder fighter, the "Zero." No Zeros were lost.

New designers were emerging in the USSR: Mikoyan and Gruevich, who would produce the famous MiG; the Lavochkin design collective, and the talented Alexander Yakovlev, who had his prototype Yak-1 fighter flying early in 1940. The new designs were in the works but time was running short.

In late 1940, the *Luftwaffe* began sending photo-recon flights over the Soviet Union. Russian pilots were forbidden to intercept by order of Stalin, who was apparently observing the Non-Aggression Pact he had signed with Hitler in 1939.

In 1940, production of the I-16 was phased out with the Type 24. The "new breed" of Soviet fighters was still going through its growing pains well into 1941. Development and tooling-up had fallen behind schedule. Even re-equipment of existing squadrons presented problems.

It wasn't all over for the I-16 yet, however. Because of retooling delays for the newer fighters, the I-16 Type 24 was ordered back into production in 1941, and an additional 450 were produced. By mid-1941, the I-16 still made up 65 percent of the total Soviet fighter force.

After Hitler launched his Operation *BARBAROSSA*, on June 22, 1941, Polikarpov's I-16 "*Ishak*" (Little Donkey), as it was now called, would draw all the dirty jobs of combat against superior German types for up to two years.

As the German Panzers steamrolled their way across the vast Russian plains and it became alarmingly clear that the industrial centers would soon be threatened, the Kremlin ordered entire factories moved, together with workers and families, 800 miles east of Moscow. Aircraft production came to a virtual standstill until this gigantic undertaking had been accomplished.

In the interim, many high-scoring Russian aces got their start while flying the I-16. P. T. Kharitonov, M. P. Zhukov and S.P. Zdorovtsev all received the title "Hero of the Soviet Union" while flying the Ishak. The first unit to receive the coveted "Guards" title was No.1 I.A.P., flying the I-16, Type 24.

By late 1943 the I-16 was finally being relegated to the less active rear areas and to training. Kiril A. Yevstigneyev, fifth-ranking Soviet ace with 52 victories, flew the I-16 with the 728 I.A.P. until the middle of 1943. *Luftwaffe* ace Erich Hartmann, who had 352 victories—all on the Eastern Front—was to shoot down only one I-16.

When the I-16 was first introduced in 1934, it had no production-line contemporaries. It was truly a Russian first, but later the Russians merely continued to update its dated basic design. Even Polikarpov's abortive I-180/I-185 of 1938 was little more than an attempt to improve the basic concept. Combat in Spain, China and Finland had shown weaknesses in the I-16's armament. These were rectified with 20mm cannon on the Type 17, but at the expense of added weight. The I-16 was to the Soviets what the P-40 fighter would be to the U.S. Army Air Corps.

Until something better was available, it was about all there was. The *Mosca*, *Rata*, *Ishak*, *Abu*, or whatever appellation one may prefer, was for a time *THE* Russian fighter. Prewar propaganda posters depicted its unmistakable portly silhouette flying over smiling crowds of Russian workers. After the war started, though, the I-16 gave way to the MiG-3 on the posters.

Polikarpov died on July 30, 1944. Since he had suffered disgrace after BARBAROSSA, his design collective was promptly disbanded and all designs that bore his name fell into disfavor and were forthwith cancelled. □

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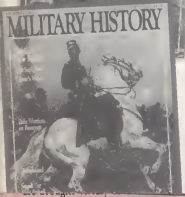

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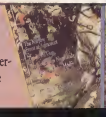

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This Finnish Air Force I-16's hand-cranked wheels have been replaced by skis. The Russian craft was used by several nations during the course of the war and flew against both Germans and Japanese.

and I-16 fighters thus had gained the dubious distinction of being the first aerial victims of Japan's brand-new wonder fighter, the "Zero." No Zeros were lost.

New designers were emerging in the USSR: Mikoyan and Gruevich, who would produce the famous MiG; the Lavochkin design collective, and the talented Alexander Yakovlev, who had his prototype Yak-1 fighter flying early in 1940. The new designs were in the works but time was running short.

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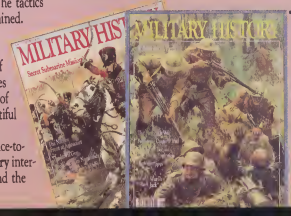

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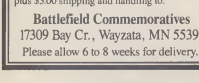

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UnderCover

Continued from page 10

swift job which had not yet become operational."

Baur recalled, too, that the *Führer* disdained Hess' flying as too dangerous to his possible successor's life and had forbidden him to fly without a full flight captain in attendance, but the man who'd been a fighter pilot in the First World War, while Hitler was a landbound soldier in the trenches, laughed and scorned such caution.

So it was now that Baur reminded the late Hess of Hitler's orders, commenting that the Deputy *Führer* didn't need a map, since his own flight captain would provide a daily update for him, but Hess was strangely insistent that he wanted his own copy. Baur told him that he must see Göring's own Number Two man, *Luftwaffe* Field Marshal Erhard Milch—who was just as astonished as Baur—but even more so. Later, the Field Marshal told Baur: "Well, after all, he's the Deputy *Führer*, and I suppose there's such a thing as being over-cautious. I'd better let him have it."

They would come to regret their decision, shocked to learn that Hess had gone to the famed air-craft designer, Dr. Willy Messerschmidt, to have Hitler's "non-solo flight" prohibition lifted, even telling the startled executive "that he had a special mission about which he was unable to talk."

Messerschmidt's staff worried, however, when Hess flew the plane alone, as he appeared to be clumsy at it despite his previous career in the air.

As Baur later told his Soviet captors during 10 years of imprisonment in Russia: "Hess had a number of changes made in the plane. . . he had the radar apparatus so installed that he could use it without assistance. . . Hess had begun to show a keen interest in instrument and beam flying."

Why? What murky "mission" was the quirky, eccentric Deputy *Führer* really up to? What, indeed? Baur hadn't long to wonder, as, on June 10, 1941, he received sudden orders to fly Hitler back to Berlin from his mountain retreat at Berchtesgaden. From a window overlooking the Chancellery garden, Baur could see Hitler and Göring talking excitedly. Baur approached to eavesdrop, then heard Hitler say: "He must have gone mad, or he couldn't have done a thing like that to me! He's stabbed me in the back. . ."

Hitler soon told the startled Baur what had happened. As Baur wrote: "It appeared that Hess had got into his Me. 210—no doubt with his map and newly-acquired knowledge—and flown, it was supposed, to England."

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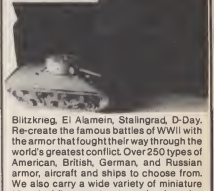

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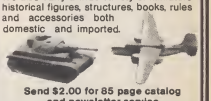

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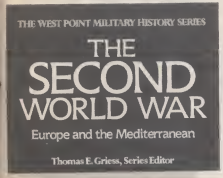
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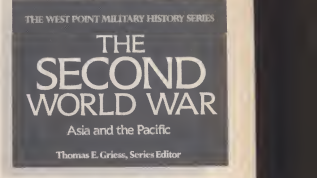

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During more tranquil times, at Landsberg prison in 1923, Hess strums for Adolf Hitler. In later years, Hitler would reward the friendship.

Hess indeed had taken off from the Augsberg airport and ordered his two adjutants to deliver a secret letter to Hitler explaining his actions some five hours later. His avowed intention was to use his good offices with the English—a rapport developed, he thought, during the 1936 Olympics—to end the fighting between Nazi Germany and Great Britain in order to more fully concentrate on the *Führer's* top-secret planned invasion of the Soviet Union, then set for late spring of 1941.

Perhaps the British might even join in on the assault against their former Bolshevik foes of 1919? No one knew.

Nor was anyone at this point in Germany sure what had happened to Hess. As Baur related, "His flight had been plotted up to the neighborhood of Amsterdam...our experts didn't give him much of a chance of getting to England. Constant patrols were flown over the North Sea precisely to deal with German planes flying to England, and there was a very good chance that Hess had been intercepted and shot down into the sea."

That was exactly what Hitler and Hess' fellow aviation buff, Göring, hoped would happen—and thus spare the *Führer* possible embarassment among allies thinking he was trying to sign a separate peace with England or among enemies learning prematurely of his intentions to smash the USSR. But Hess was not shot down.

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An Invasion Not Found In History Books

By James Martin Davis

DEEP IN THE RECESSES of the National Archives in Washington lay hidden for nearly four decades the thick, dusty files containing top secret documents named "Flog Violet." These documents, now declassified, are the plans for Operation Downfall, the invasion of Japan during World War II. Only a few Americans in 1945 were aware of the elaborate plans that had been prepared for the Allied invasion of the Japanese home islands. It was later fully expected that the Japanese would be subjected to another two invasions had it been necessary.

Operation Downfall was scheduled during the spring and summer of 1945. It called for two massive, military undertakings to be carried out in succession and aimed at the heart of the Japanese Empire.

In the first invasion, code-named Operation Olympic, the U.S. Sixth Army in the Pacific would land on Japan's southernmost island during the sixth morning hours of May 1, 1945. 42 years ago today. Fourteen combat divisions of soldiers and Marines would land on Kyushu, initiated and defended Kyushu, the southernmost of the Japanese home islands, after an unprecedented naval and aerial bombardment.

The second invasion, March 1, 1946, code-named Operation Coronet, would involve some 22 combat divisions totaling over 1 million Japanese defenders on the main island of Honshu and the Tokyo Plain. Its goal: the unconditional surrender of Japan.

With the exception of a portion of the British Pacific Fleet, Operation Downfall was to be a virtually American operation. It called for using the entire Marine Corps, the entire Pacific Navy, and elements of the 7th Army, the Army of the Philippines, and troops withdrawn from Europe via the 20th Air Force and the American Far Eastern Air Force.

More than 1.5 million combat troops with 3 million more in support were to be used. All in all, it was expected that by 1945 would be directly involved in the one amphibious assault.

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headlines blared on the 13th, "Rudolf Hess in Glasgow—Official."

"I Found German Living in Field," was the headline quoting Scottish farmer David McLean, who reportedly arrested the Deputy *Führer* singlehandedly with a country pitchfork. While Hitler and his nervous henchmen were fearful over what Hess might reveal, they had little recourse, for their British foes remained essentially mum about the strange flight until after the war was won—and even then, their former ally, the USSR, didn't believe the official story given out.

And yet, apparently, they had been telling the truth after all. Hess stated that he came seeking peace with the English as an unofficial special envoy from the Third Reich—but without the *Führer's* consent or even knowledge. He came specifically to see the Duke of Hamilton (whom he did get to visit) to plot the overthrow of the anti-Nazi Churchill government and install in its place a pro-Nazi regime. Instead, Churchill himself sent a Foreign Office undersecretary, Sir Ivone Kirkpatrick, to interview the incarcerated Deputy *Führer*. Kirkpatrick and others concluded that Hess, indeed, had acted on his own, and was mentally unstable. Still, he had been rational enough to bail out of his plane within 12 miles of Hamilton's Scottish home.

Despondent, Hess realized that, far from being welcomed as the bringer of peace from Hitler, the British now regarded him as just a prisoner of war—if, granted, an extraordinary one.

Under house arrest in the English countryside, Hess tried to kill himself by hurling his body down a staircase in a manor two years after his flight.

He outlived Hitler, though, and met up with Göring again as an accused war criminal before the International Military Tribunal at Nuremberg during 1945-46. At first, he feigned amnesia, then startled the courtroom with the claim that he now had his memory "back." And who was the *real* Rudolf Hess? Thant became indeed, one of the paramount questions over the years, especially when, in 1979, British author W. Hugh Thomas, in his book *The Murder of Rudolf Hess*, would suggest that a double—and not the original "Rudi"—had been the man captured by the British. By this theory, "Hess" was, in fact, an agent sent by *Reichsführer* SS Heinrich Himmler to negotiate a peace with Himmler himself—not Hitler—in control. (That was a ploy Himmler *did* try in 1945, as the Third Reich collapsed.)

In this scenario, it was the double who stood trial and stoically endured more than four decades of imprisonment at Spandau Fortress outside Berlin. The real Hess—an avowedly loyal Hitler ally—had been executed by Himmler beforehand,

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much as he had engineered the 1934 "Night of the Long Knives" purge against the unruly SA Brownshirts.

Still another unanswered query is whether Hitler in 1941 knew in advance of Hess' plan or not? Both Hess and Hitler always maintained publicly that the *Führer* did not, but who really knows for sure? In Spandau, Hess told Hitler's architect, Albert Speer, that he believed Hitler would have "made it up with me" after the war.

But how had Hess managed to fly to Britain in 1941, seemingly unimpeded? Armed with his documents and skill as a pilot, Hess' took a route "north across Germany, over Holland and across the North Sea to Holy Island," states the 1970 volume *Hess: The Man and His Mission* by J. Bernard Hutton. Alone in the clear night sky off the coast of Scotland, Hess felt vulnerable and alone, prey to English fighters.

"He relied on his compasses, which had been strapped to each thigh, to keep on course; he was also aided by a directional signal from Paris and the dance music signals which were transmitted from. . .Denmark. He was not doing badly for a man of 47 who had led a sedentary occupation for 25 years. . ." With his superior Me 210 aircraft, he successfully dodged a patrolling Spitfire and soon recognized the small town of Belford, 20 miles from his destination, the Duke's Dungavel House.

At last he sighted it, but then decided against his original plan of simply landing the plane—he could be killed in a crash, after all. He decided instead on a parachute landing, allowing the plane itself to fly on ahead and crash. Now, however, he found that the wind-pressure held him in his seat as if he were glued to it. He turned the plane upside down in order to simply drop out. His inexperience at "looping the loop" though caused him and the plane to be flying straight down towards the earth, and he nearly blacked out.

"He knew the plane must crash at any moment and he made a last desperate effort. He pressed the soles of his feet against the cockpit floor and thrust himself up into space. To his astonishment, he felt himself fall free. As cold air whipped his face, his fumbling fingers found the parachute ripcord."

As he floated gently down to earth, he later recalled, he marveled that he had escaped death. Upon impact, though, he injured an ankle, then was dragged along the ground by his billowing chute, face first. From out of the darkness someone was shouting to him, a stranger who helped him out of his harness and into the pages of history—David McLean, a simple Scottish ploughman armed with a pitchfork. □

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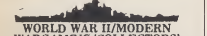

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Personality

Continued from page 16

mander in Southeast Asia, later claimed that the idea of a monsoon campaign was his (Mountbatten, the last Viceroy of India, had a tendency to annex all successful ideas to his own record). There is no doubt, however, that the driving impetus was Slim's. Sir William's plan was to force the Irrawaddy, but at an unexpected place, and then sever Japanese communications with their base at Rangoon.

Slim did not intend merely to push the Japanese army back but to surround, unbalance and annihilate it. This he did in another sprawling battle in the opening months of 1945. First deceiving the Japanese into believing that one of his corps, crossing on both sides of Mandalay, represented his whole army, Slim then put his other corps across the river a hundred miles below the city, thrust eastward and seized the communication center of Meiktila. The effect on the Japanese was not unlike that produced on the French when, instead of coming across the Belgian plain as expected in May 1940, the German panzers erupted out of the Ardennes forest. Unlike the French army, the Japanese continued to fight and die with obdurate courage. This slowed matters up but did not alter the final result. Its commanders caught off balance, the outgeneralled Japanese were then outfought. The Japanese army defending the Irrawaddy was destroyed.

Victory, however, presented Slim with a major problem. His entire army was now concentrated in central Burma. His supply line, a logistic wonder that employed every known form of transport from Dakotas, railways (in two gauges) and trucks to river steamers and barges to porters and elephants, was already creaking and would cease to function when the monsoon broke in May. Before then Slim needed a deep-water port—Rangoon. It was 300 miles away, and between Slim and Rangoon there were still the remnants of two Japanese armies. No longer able to win, they could still fight, die—and delay. Quickly reorganizing after the Mandalay-Meiktila battles, Slim launched "SOB" ("Sea or Bust") on April 11, 1945. He took an enormous gamble and completely dropped his overland supply line. As his forces drove for Rangoon, they built rough airstrips every 50 or 60 miles, into which the now desperately overworked Dakotas brought the supplies for the next leap forward.

SOB drove on, in spite of desperate, if disjointed, Japanese resistance, eating up the miles to Rangoon at a rate that challenges comparison with some of the war's better known examples of *Blitzkreigz*—Guderian's thrust to the

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Slim's immediate reward for the reconquest of Burma was to be dismissed. Lieutenant General Sir Oliver Leese, was Allied Land Forces Command, South East Asia (ALFSEA). A high-level coordinator, Leese was a large, genial looking Guardsman of distinctly moderate abilities. One of Monty's favorite subordinates—he did what he was told and was unlikely to outshine his master—Leese had succeeded Montgomery as 8th Army commander when, in December 1943, Monty moved on to greater things. Leese had a rather patronizing view of Fourteenth army. Slim paid relatively little attention to Sir Oliver, whose position, in any case, had something of the fifth wheel about it. Now, in May 1945, Leese decided Slim was "tired" and proposed to give him a rest. Leese ought to have remembered Irwin. When the dust settled this time, Slim was no longer Fourteenth Army commander—he now had Leese's job.

He would go on to add colorful and important chapters to his story, telling Winston Churchill over lunch at Chequers on the eve of the 1945 election that Fourteenth Army would vote Labour, and ultimately succeeding Monty as the professional head of the British Army in 1948. (Monty tried to prevent this, with as much success as Irwin and Leese had had). The lower-middle class boy who had slipped into the Army with the aid of a world war ended his military career as Field Marshal Sir William Slim.

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